

THE INVESTIGATORS in

THE MYSTERY OF THE SAMURAI SWORD





in

**THE MYSTERY
OF THE
SAMURAI SWORD**

At Shadow Stone, a boarding school located in a remote area, strange happenings lead to a student going missing. The school principal approaches The Three Investigators to solve the mystery. While Bob stations himself outside the school in a nearby town, Jupiter and Pete go undercover as prospective students attending an orientation programme—only to realize that they are not welcome there. Soon, they discover that the school is being terrorized by a group of students who are trained in traditional Japanese sword fighting.

The Three Investigators
in
The Mystery of the Samurai Sword

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1. 潜伏搜查

Undercover Investigation

Pete huddled against the rock in fear. He held his breath and cautiously pushed forward a little to see what was happening.

“Traitor!” a voice called out.

Immediately Pete recognized it. The sun’s rays were falling through the branches now, as if all was calm and peaceful, but his heart was pounding all the way to his ears. For him, it was the darkest place in the world.

“Traitors must die!” Slowly the words came, very coldly. Pete closed his eyes, trying to gain control of himself.

“—And you are a traitor!”

Pete knew that he had to do something, but what? Then he heard something else—a very fine, high-pitched sound. It was the sword—a short swing that cut the air. This could only lead to one thing—death!

The blood froze in his veins. Why had they accepted this assignment? Suddenly, images flashed through his mind—it all began less than a week ago...

It was a sunny afternoon during the first week of summer vacation. The Three Investigators—Jupiter Jones, Pete Crenshaw and Bob Andrews—were hard at work at The Jones Salvage Yard in Rocky Beach.

“Pete!”

“Yes, Jupe?”

“There’s a man here to see us. Where are you?”

Pete threw aside the dirty rag he had been using to clean a dismantled boat motor. “What do you mean ‘us’?”

“Well, us—The Three Investigators!”

“Okay, I’m coming!” Pete wiped his hands on his jeans, stood up, and stepped out from the outdoor workshop.

Jupiter and Bob had already stood up from the box of books Uncle Titus had given them to look through. Next to them was a small dark-haired man of perhaps fifty.

The man was Asian, probably Japanese. He was dignified, dressed in dark brown corduroy trousers and a matching jacket. Through his silver-rimmed glasses, he gave the Second Investigator an appraising look.

“Pete Crenshaw,” Pete introduced himself and stretched out his hand.

The man returned the handshake. His eyes flickered slightly. “Takashi Yukawa. I am a school principal,” he said formally. A hint of nervousness came through in his voice. “So you are The Three Investigators?”

Jupiter nodded. “Yes, Mr Yukawa. Here is our card...”



“... So you want to ask for our help?”

Mr Yukawa nodded and looked around. Just then, Aunt Mathilda trudged across the courtyard. She carried a basket full of old clothes in her hands and gave the four of them a suspicious look.

Jupiter watched as his aunt went into the yard office and kept herself busy with something. The First Investigator then turned to the school principal. “There is just too much going on at my uncle’s salvage yard. The best thing is to sit down at a beach café and discuss your matter without being disturbed.”

Mr Yukawa seemed to be very comfortable with that. He pocketed the business card and pointed to a car parked in the driveway. “I can drive all of us there.”

The Three Investigators agreed, and shortly afterwards, without Aunt Mathilda realizing, they took their seats in the luxurious Lexus.

“Which school do you run?” Jupiter asked when Mr Yukawa had started the car. “I don’t think it’s in Rocky Beach, otherwise I’m sure I’d know you.”

Mr Yukawa smiled and turned into the main road leading down to the beach. “You are quite right. I run Shadow Stone, an all-boys boarding school. It is located in a large castle complex in a remote area far out in the mountains. The school’s founder, Riku Nishimura, acquired the premises many decades ago from a rich European immigrant.

“The castle was then developed into a school. We are very well-equipped—student residence, library, great sports facilities... All the students live there and feel very comfortable because our founder wanted it that way. He was Japanese like me and adhered to an ancient and strict culture.”

“Shadow Stone—I’ve read something about that before,” interjected Pete. “Is this for filthy rich parents that cannot stand having their sons around the house, and so send them to your school to be disciplined?”

“Pete!” Jupiter interrupted him with a warning undertone in his voice.

Mr Yukawa smiled. “Your friend has a point, Jupiter. We do indeed have a few students who have had a difficult past, and also some whose parents support us with a lot of money... but that doesn’t mean that the boys aren’t all right. We are very careful in selecting our students, as we get a lot of donations so that even students whose parents could not afford to pay for boarding school can come to us. That’s how the founder of the school wanted it. Many of our graduates have gone on to become famous. There are actors among them, business leaders, artists, sportsmen...”

“That sounds really exciting,” Pete said with interest.

Mr Yukawa cleared his throat and his voice became harder. “In any case, we don’t like to talk about it. We’re very discreet about that.”

“I understand...” Pete remembered that in the report about the boarding school, there had been repeated references to ancient Japanese tradition. “Ancient Japanese teachings have a special meaning at Shadow Stone, don’t they?”

Mr Yukawa nodded and, at a signal from Jupiter, steered his car into a car park near the beach.

“That is true. Peace and quiet are important to us, and meditation is on our timetable. We have formed a secluded and very close-knit community... but please don’t think of it as too secretive. The boys that go to my school are not much different from you.”

Mr Yukawa and The Three Investigators got out. Nearby was the beach café, and there was not much going on yet. A few tourists were lapping up their ice cream and gazing dreamily out at the calm sea.

The three boys sat down at an empty table with Mr Yukawa. Bob, who was sitting directly opposite the principal, noticed a small pin adorning Mr Yukawa’s lapel. It was a tiny curved sword with a golden handle.

Mr Yukawa noticed Bob’s gaze. “The small sword depicted on this pin symbolizes an authentic Japanese battle sword,” he said, pointing to the pin with a smile. “The founder of our school entrusted this remarkable sword to us, and it is placed under the custody of the school principal. The handle of the sword is meticulously crafted from pure gold and adorned with jewels; and the blade is forged from the finest high-carbon steel known as *tamahagane*. This pin serves as a modest yet powerful emblem of our esteemed legacy.”

“Is that a samurai sword?” Pete asked.

“Yes,” Mr Yukawa replied. “It is known as a *katana*.”

“Nice,” said Pete, “but now I want a big ice cream first.”

Mr Yukawa laughed. “Of course. You won’t believe it, but so do I.” They studied the menu and ordered.

“So, Mr Yukawa...” Jupiter began. “What’s the issue that you are facing now?”

The school principal shook his head. “A few things have been occurring at our school lately. Strange things happened at night, there were thefts, and we had to expel a student from the school for assaulting the caretaker. Rumours of a revenge story are running rampant among the students, and suddenly one student, Percy, has disappeared.”

The Three Investigators looked at each other questioningly. “Is this about... an abduction?” asked Bob.

“That was what we suspected at first, but we really don’t know. There’s just been no sign of him for five days.”

“Have the police been called in?” asked Jupiter.

Mr Yukawa nodded. “Yes, of course. They think that he just ran away like he did before, but I am not sure.”

“How did you come to approach us?” Jupiter asked just after the waitress had brought their ice cream.

“Percy’s parents were very worried. They consulted their circle of friends and one of them suggested that I contact the three of you. Percy’s parents also think that it is a good idea. Well, the police investigations are one thing, but his parents want more to be done.”

“We understand that,” Jupe said. “Are there any recent happenings involving Percy?”

“He has changed recently and become quite withdrawn. Then there was graffiti with the words ‘Percy: Traitor!’ in blood-red letters, right on the wall of the residential building.”

“You suspect something bad has happened to him,” Pete asked. “I suppose from the graffiti, he could be involved in some strange story.”

“Yes, I would like to shed light on what happened, but unfortunately I can’t tell you any more than that. I have asked many students about it, but in my questioning, I came up against a wall of silence.”

“As you are the principal, how much would the students want to tell you?” Pete asked somewhat cheekily.

“That’s right,” Mr Yukawa replied with a grin. “By the way...”—he pulled out his wallet, rummaged through it, and produced a photograph to show the boys—“This is Percy Watson. He’s 16 and about the same height as Jupiter. His parents live near here in Santa Monica.” The photo featured a boy with thick black hair, a centre part, and dark brown eyes—just a typical teenager.

“This could be really useful,” Bob said. With Mr Yukawa’s permission, he snapped a digital copy of the photo with his mobile phone.

“So you want us to help,” Jupe said, “and I can already guess how. We’re not adults.”

“You are a smart guy,” said Mr Yukawa. “You are young. You learn more from student to student. It’s true I would like to bring you to the school... at least for a few days.”

Jupiter grinned.

“—But it’s the school vacation now,” Bob interjected.

“Even during the vacation, some students remain with us,” said Mr Yukawa. “as some parents don’t have time for them. The school is open all the time, even when we are not holding classes. There are recreational groups and tutoring programmes for students. There are also several sports clubs that are conducting activities. We are right next to a mountain. You can climb and hike to mountain lakes.”

Mr Yukawa paused for a moment and then asked: “So, are you in?”

Jupiter, Pete and Bob looked at each other. The matter sounded mysterious but interesting. The alternative for the next few days was to spruce up the salvage yard under the constant supervision of the labour camp commander, Aunt Mathilda—day by day, chore by chore, drop by drop of sweat—as long as the vacation lasted.

After exchanging glances, they said, as if from the same mouth: “Yes!”

2. 影石へ続く道 The Road to Shadow Stone

When Aunt Mathilda heard that Jupiter and his friends wanted to go to school voluntarily in the middle of the vacation, she first had to laugh out loud.

“That’s a whole new thing,” she remarked. “Did I put something in your cherry pie today, or have you suddenly come to your senses?”

“Neither,” Jupiter replied, slightly annoyed. “An acquaintance has asked us to help him—to be precise, it’s the principal of the school.”

“What about the work here at the salvage yard?”

“That would have to wait then, I’m afraid. Aunt Mathilda, I think an insight into such an elite school would definitely benefit us.”

Aunt Mathilda swayed her head. “Very well,” she then said. “After all, I still have your uncle to help me... and it won’t do you any harm to get out for a few days.” She smiled mischievously at Jupiter. “—Even though I’m sure you’re more interested in an adventure than participating in school activities.”

“You definitely have too much imagination running through your veins,” Jupe said and winked at her. “Thank you, Aunt Mathilda!”

Elated, Jupiter then scurried to the headquarters of the Three Investigators.

Headquarters was an old mobile home trailer hidden under piles of junk and scrap metal on the grounds of the salvage yard. Getting into it was through secret entrances. The trailer served as both a secret meeting place and hideout for the three boys.

Pete and Bob, who had called their parents in the meantime, were already waiting at Headquarters.

“So?” the First Investigator asked his two friends.

“All clear,” said Bob. “We can go tomorrow. Strangely enough, our parents have no objections to school visits. So Jupe, you can call Mr Yukawa to work out the details.”

The First Investigator reached for the phone and dialled the number the school principal had given him. The call was answered immediately.

“Mr Yukawa, we will come to you at Shadow Stone tomorrow,” Jupiter informed him.

“Good, I’m glad to hear that. In the meantime, I’ve already given some thought to how we can set up your visit. You’ll be here on an orientation programme to determine whether you would want to join us in the upcoming semester. Nobody here will know that you are undercover to investigate the case. I have also thought that it’s best to approach the case from two angles. Percy might have taken refuge with friends in Danville—that’s the closest town. There, I would like to post one of you investigators.”

“Have you thought of anyone in particular?” asked Jupiter.

“Bob,” Mr Yukawa said. “I read on your card that he is in charge of research. That’s a perfect fit, isn’t it? Bob can stay in a small local hotel and ask around a bit—inconspicuously, of course. He can keep in touch with you through me, as mobile phones are strictly prohibited at the school.

“—And at the school, I’d like you, Jupiter and Pete, to be there. Pete seems very sporty to me, and Percy was in a martial arts club. I would assign Pete the room in which Percy

stayed—with Zeno Daniels, Percy's roommate. Maybe he can learn something from him. You, Jupiter, will be in the room of Kisho Tamura, a long-time Shadow Stone student whose previous roommate was the boy we had to expel a few days ago."

"The arrangement sounds plausible," Jupiter said. They talked for a while longer, then Jupiter said goodbye.

No sooner was the handset back on the old phone than Bob grumbled: "I want to join you at the school too! Why didn't you counter Mr Yukawa's arrangement?"

Jupiter looked at him calmly. "He is our client. Besides, he knows his school better. Your strength is research, and Pete is the most athletic of us... and who knows, maybe you'll come out on top in the end and find Percy. Maybe he's in Danville."

"—Or you could come to the school in a cloak-and-dagger operation and save us," Pete said jokingly. In reality, he did not believe that this assignment would be dangerous—not this time. What could go wrong in a school with well-behaved elite students?

"Danville is not far from the school," Jupiter said. "We'll meet up sometime."

"All right," Bob conceded for the time being. "—But take a mobile phone with you. I don't care if it's prohibited in the school. I might need your help..."

The next day they drove to Danville. The longer the drive, the more lonely and mountainous the area became.

Jupiter sat in the passenger seat of Pete's MG and studied the map. "The turn-off should be coming soon," he said.

The road led through a forest towards a dark, shadowy mountain with boulders rising into the sky like black sails. It looked impressively mighty.

"There it is!" Bob called out. There was a small sign on the right-hand side of the road that said 'Danville'. Shortly afterwards came the turn-off. A narrow, bumpy road led straight up the mountain. "Can we take a break here before going on?"

"Sure," Pete agreed, and he stopped his car at the side of the road. Then the three of them got out.

"It's pretty cold here," Bob said, shivering. "—And quiet." He walked a few steps into the countryside and looked around. A few ravens flew towards the mountain. Since The Three Investigators had stopped, no other car had overtaken them.

"It's pretty lonely as well," Jupiter said and stood next to Bob. A few moments later, they went back to Pete, who was leaning silently against the car, staring at the mountain.

Suddenly the Second Investigator pushed himself away from the car. "Fellas, someone's coming up ahead!"

They heard a rattle that slowly grew louder. It belonged to a small truck. When it reached them, it braked. The window was rolled down, and an unshaven man peered out. "Ah, the fresh meat!" he said, laughing with a gurgle.

The Three Investigators looked at the gap-toothed man in confusion.

"Fresh meat?" asked Bob incredulously.

"Well, you're the new students, aren't you? Who else would you be? But I thought there were only two."

"Only two of us are going to the school," Jupiter said and stepped forward. "Will you please tell us who you are?"

"Crowe, the caretaker of Shadow Stone. You'll get to know me!" He coughed. "Anyone who breaks the school rules will go to my torture chamber." Chuckling, he rolled up the window, put his truck in gear and drove on.

Puzzled, The Three Investigators looked at him leaving.

“I guess now I’m glad I’m staying in Danville and not at the school,” Bob said, “if they have people like him there...”

3. 冷ややかな迎え A Cold Reception

The Three Investigators got into their car and Pete drove on. They took a few bends through the countryside and shortly after, they reached the first houses of Danville.

The small town lay entirely in the shadow of one of the steep rock faces of the mountain. Essentially, the place consisted of the few houses that lay along the main road. Very soon, they were already at the end of the town.

“Danville is smaller than I thought,” Jupiter said. “Somehow we must have missed a turn.”

Pete turned the car around and drove slowly back. They passed the centre of the town, where there was a small shop and a pub next door.

“I’d better ask for directions,” Jupiter said.

Pete stopped and they got out. A sudden cool breeze blew up street dust and paper waste. They coughed and looked around.

“There!” said Bob, pointing in the direction of the mountain. “Shadow Stone...”

In a narrow valley, wedged between steep rock faces, lay the boarding school. It looked like a castle, hewn out of the dark rock of its surroundings. A tower could be seen, but the distance was too great to make out any further details.

Pete, at any rate, felt a chill run down his spine. “Not very inviting,” he muttered. “No wonder someone runs away from there.”

“Maybe everything looks quite nice up close,” Jupiter commented to try to save the mood. “—But for now, let’s worry about where we’re going to drop Bob off.”

The Three Investigators entered the small shop. There were no customers. Behind the cash register sat a pretty girl, hardly older than they were. She smiled kindly at them and the expressions of The Three Investigators brightened.

“We’re looking for the Wilbury Hotel,” Bob said.

The girl put aside a magazine she had been reading. “That’s not far from here. Are you Bob Andrews?”

Bob looked at her in surprise.

“I’m Mandy,” the girl said. “My uncle runs the hotel. That’s how I know we’re getting a new guest today. After all, we don’t have many overnight stays. However, he was only expecting one person, not three.” Her eyes fell on Pete and Jupiter.

“Jupiter Jones,” Jupiter introduced himself. “Pete and I are going to the boarding school for an orientation programme and staying there for a few days. Bob is just accompanying us, as we are... going on a little holiday in this area afterwards.”

Mandy winked at Bob. “Hope you have a good time here while you wait for your friends.”

“It should be easier for me now,” Bob said charmingly.

Jupiter shook his head and turned away to look around the shop a little. There really was everything here—cornflakes, toothpaste, screwdrivers, cheese. He noticed a glass display case in which several swords were laid out. This was unusual for a general shop in a small lonely town. He stepped closer.

“Those are not real swords,” Mandy said. “Of course, we are not allowed to sell real ones. What we have there are wooden replicas of old samurai swords—battle swords from Japan.”

Jupe looked at her appraisingly, and she added: “There’s a Samurai Club at Shadow Stone whose members have nothing but this Japanese stuff on their minds. When the parents of those students come to visit, they sometimes buy such a sword as a souvenir. We are helping the school sell them here.”

“Probably quite a good deal,” Jupiter said, glancing at the prices.

Mandy nodded. “That’s right. They are hand-crafted by a craftsman who also makes real swords.”

“Get a grip, Jupe,” Pete said. “We’re going to be late! How do we find your uncle’s hotel, Mandy?”

“One hundred metres along the main road, then turn right onto a small path. You can hardly miss it—there’s a broken-down Chrysler at the junction.”

The Three Investigators said goodbye and left the shop.

As if they had been waiting for it, the wind blew dirt into the air again. Bob coughed.

The Wilbury Hotel was a small, somewhat run-down country house off the main road.

Mandy’s uncle, an elderly man with sagging cheeks, led Bob into a small, dimly lit room whose tiny window overlooked a fenced sheep pasture. Beyond the fence stretched a vast forest, and a distance further, was the boarding school.

“Cute,” Pete said after helping Bob carry in his luggage. He looked around. “I certainly hope our rooms are better cleaned.”

“From what I’ve heard about boarding schools, you have to do the cleaning there yourselves,” Bob said, grinning. “Now get going.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I’ll catch up on some sleep first, Pete, and take my time to think about how to approach this case.”

Jupiter and Pete said goodbye and got into the car. A few minutes later, the MG rumbled along the narrow, winding road that led to the boarding school. Silently, the two friends looked at the area.

The boulders were getting closer and closer to the road, so close that Pete was almost afraid for his car. Then the ravine widened a little and revealed a shady valley with Shadow Stone perched on its right slope.

Pete found the structure massive, dark and hostile. As a child, this was how he had imagined the castles in Transylvania—where vampires supposedly lived.

Past the large entrance gate, signs were set up to direct visitors to a car park. There were only a few cars there. Pete parked his car next to a blue Chrysler. “—So my MG doesn’t feel so alone,” he murmured lovingly.

They stepped out of the car, retrieved their luggage from the boot, and navigated the uneven, loamy terrain towards the main building. Jupiter opened the main door, and they stepped into an anteroom, where a reception counter was positioned to one side.

There, behind a glass panel, sat a boy who looked a little older than them. He looked at them condescendingly from his sharply cut eyes. “Are you here for the orientation programme?”

“Yes,” said Jupiter. “I’m Jupiter, and this is Pete.”

The boy nodded, stood up, and came through a side door into the anteroom. He was a good head taller than Jupiter, and he sported long hair, which he styled by securing a bun just above the nape of his neck while allowing the rest to flow freely as a ponytail. Coolly he said: "Sena Hattori. Welcome to Shadow Stone."

"Are you also a student here?" asked Jupe.

"Mr Crowe, the caretaker, is out. I'm filling in for him."

"The caretaker? That's the strange character in the old truck," Pete quipped.

"I'll show you where you are now," Sena said, without elaborating to Pete's remark.

"Can we speak to Mr Yukawa?" Jupe asked.

"No. He has been called to a meeting in San Francisco."

Jupiter and Pete exchanged a glance. "Why so suddenly?" asked Jupiter.

Sena looked at him as if checking whether Jupiter was worthy of an answer. "He's not only a school principal," he said. "He has other businesses to attend to. So come now."

The two investigators took their luggage and followed Sena, who was already walking down the hallway. Confused, but also impressed, Pete noted Sena's stride—steady and firm, almost arrogant. There was something soldierly about the way the boy pushed his chest forward and arched his back.

After a few metres, Sena pulled open a door to the side. "Put your stuff down. I'll show you the grounds... Come on, I haven't got all day."

Jupiter and Pete hurried up. They went up a narrow, steep spiral staircase, at the end of which a wooden door led outside.

Jupiter and Pete stepped outside in surprise. They were on the rooftop of the tower! Sena was already standing at the battlements, beckoning them impatiently. They stepped closer and looked into a vast area surrounded by the high wall.

"To the left is the residential building,"—Sena pointed briefly in that direction—"to the right is the building with the classrooms, and diagonally across from us are the dining hall and the sports hall."

Pete was delighted to find that there were some athletics facilities behind the hall. A cold breeze blew and he rubbed his arms, shivering.

"What's that?" he asked, pointing to a smaller tower protruding from another part of the building.

"Forbidden," Sena said in a tone that nipped any further questions in the bud. "Forget it!"

The Second Investigator nodded. He looked at Jupiter, who was silently looking down at the school grounds. Hardly any students were there. There were paths between the buildings that seemed to have been laid out on a drawing board. There were also many trees and bushes growing, and they seemed to have been planted and pruned according to a strict pattern.

"I'll take you to Mr Hector now. He is standing in for our school principal," Sena said, turning around.

Jupiter and Pete were led back to the ground floor. The school's administration was in the same building they were in. They walked down a hallway where hanging on the side walls were portraits of men—apparently founding members and former school principals. Then Sena knocked on a door.

"Come in!"

Sena led the way and Pete and Jupiter followed. Mr Hector stood up, came out from behind his elegant desk and pointed to a leather sofa seat. "Have a seat. Thank you, Sena."

"You're welcome, sir." Before Sena left, he gave Jupiter a disparaging look. "Look forward to the baby shower!"

"Baby shower?" Pete asked as Sena pulled the door shut behind him.

Mr Hector pushed an armchair over and let out a grumpy laugh. “Ha! On the first night, new students have to suffer a prank or two,” he said. “It’s an old tradition, but it won’t be so bad...” The man then let his well-toned body slide into his armchair. “Okay, first and foremost, my name is Hector Fujiwara, but everyone around here calls me Mr Hector. As you know, I am standing in for Mr Yukawa. I understand that you are here for an orientation programme for a few days.”

Jupiter and Pete nodded.

“Then take a look around at your leisure. Unfortunately, Mr Yukawa has been called to San Francisco at short notice for an urgent meeting. He has to meet with the school’s financial backers regarding some unforeseen events here lately... Oh, yes, I’m supposed to give you this.” Mr Hector picked up an envelope from his table and handed it to Jupiter, who decided to read it later.

“You can try out for subject-specific clubs or join the sports teams. However, of the teachers, only Anthony Fender and I are present at the moment. Mr Fender teaches sports and health science, while my speciality is chemistry and physics.” He laughed because Pete’s dislike for these subjects was written all over his face. “When Mr Yukawa returns the day after tomorrow, you will also be able to take part in the vacation classes for Japanese. That’s what he’s doing.”

Mr Hector opened a folder that had been lying on the coffee table and took two sheets from it. “Here are our school rules—rising times, resting times, auxiliary services... oh yes, mobile phones are prohibited. We have three public phone booths. Do you have a mobile phone with you?”

Jupiter and Pete shook their heads. “I left mine at home,” Jupiter said. It was a white lie. His mobile phone was switched off in his travel bag.

“Uh, me too,” Pete said, grinning uncertainly.

At that moment, something hummed. It got louder and quickly turned out to be the melody of a well-known TV crime series. The sound came directly from Pete’s jeans pocket. Its origin was clear.

“I believe you’ve got something that is prohibited here,” Mr Hector said with a grin. “Pete Crenshaw, I’m sorry. The rules are strict... even if you only want to stay here for a few days, you have to hand in the device. When you leave the school, you can collect it back from the security office.”

With a red face, Pete rummaged the phone out of his jeans pocket, while the melody droned along cheerfully, getting louder and louder.

4. ルームメイト The Roommates

Frantically, the Second Investigator looked for the ‘answer’ button on his mobile phone and pressed it.

“Yes, Bob? I can’t talk to you now so I’m hanging up... Yes, yes, bye! ... Sorry, Mr Hector.” With a guilty look, Pete handed over the phone.

“Thank you. Then Sena can show you to your rooms now. You’ll be staying in different rooms. Pete Crenshaw, you’ll be staying with Zeno Daniels, and Jupiter Jones will be with Kisho Tamura.”

He stood up and called Sena to him by phone. Then he turned to Pete and Jupe and said: “You can always come to me if you have any questions or problems. Now then, have an interesting time here at Shadow Stone.”

Just then, Sena came in and led the two of them out of the administration building and towards the residential building.

As they were about to enter the building, Jupe pointed to a part of the wall. “Just a moment! What are those red marks? It looks like paint has been washed off there.”

“That’s right,” Sena said, giving Jupiter an appraising look. “It had the word ‘Traitor’ written on it. Mr Yukawa had it cleaned off, but it obviously didn’t come off entirely.” Sena held the door open. “Let’s go!”

Jupiter did not turn around immediately. Sena had only told him half the truth, and that annoyed him. ‘Percy: Traitor!’ had been written there as Mr Yukawa had said.

Jupiter continued to stare at the spot with the paint residue. “There was another word,” he said, narrowing his eyes. “Maybe a name?”

Sena winced and looked sharply at Jupiter. “Since you’re new to Shadow Stone, you should be very careful,” he said. “Let’s go!”

First they went to Jupiter’s room. It was on the ground floor. The room was larger than Jupiter had expected, but it could have been furnished a bit more pleasantly. The heavy dark wood seemed oppressive. Through the small window, one could look across the garden to the classroom building. There was an unmade bed against the wall on the left. The other bed was right next to the door on the right side of the room... so every student had their own corner.

Kisho Tamura was not in the room. Sena pointed to an old ornate wooden wardrobe, a desk, and the bed by the door. “Your side of the room.”

“Okay,” Jupiter said, looking at Pete. “See you later!”

Zeno Daniels stayed one floor up—and on the other side of the hallway. Sena knocked once and then opened the door. Zeno sat at the desk and turned around abruptly.

“Hey, Zeno! I’ve got a surprise for you,” Sena said, grinning. “The new guy! Anyway, don’t forget tonight’s baby shower...”

Pete stepped into the room, which was similar in size to Jupiter’s. So Percy, the boy who had disappeared, had stayed in this room. Posters of ancient Asian swordsmen hung on the walls. Through the window, one could see the surrounding wall of Shadow Stone.

Zeno stood up. He was about as tall as Pete and looked very fit. This boy also had a hairstyle like Sena’s, and that further emphasized his sharp-featured face. Instead of a shirt,

he had dressed in a dark cloth-like top that slouched down his torso.

Zeno gave Pete a dismissive look. "I don't want to hear from you, I don't want to see you, so don't you dare disturb me! Is that clear?"

Pete looked at him, bewildered.

"Well, those are the rules," Sena said. "You're new. Zeno is your room boss. If he says 'Lick my shoes', you throw yourself on the floor and lick his shoes." He grinned at Zeno. "If he doesn't comply, we'll be here."

Zeno grinned back.

Without making a face, Sena pointed to a bed that stood on one side of the room next to a simple wardrobe. "There!"

Sena left the room and Pete put down his luggage. "What is it with this baby shower?" he asked, emphatically calm.

Zeno looked at Pete challengingly. "Did I give you permission to talk to me? Or are you just downright stupid? I told you that I don't want to hear from you... You're afraid, aren't you?"

"Oh, nonsense!"

"You should be, baby."

"Baby? Listen, I'm too old to be called that."

"You're here at Shadow Stone, don't forget that!" Zeno stepped menacingly close to Pete and looked him straight in the eye. "We are very special," he said slowly, "and you are... nothing! Do you understand? Absolutely nothing!"

The Second Investigator didn't move at all. Blood pulsed inside him, but he wasn't going to let it get him down that easily.

"I'm going to check if Shadow Stone is even good enough for me first, Zeno. Maybe I'll leave before you even know it."

Zeno leaned forward. His face was very close to Pete's. "That wouldn't be a bad thing... you... rotten wimp!"

Rotten wimp? Pete's adrenalin shot through his veins and his arm muscles twitched, but he just managed to control himself. It was wiser this way, even though he could possibly beat up Zeno. In any case, he and Jupe had an undercover assignment here at the school, so he had to bear with such intimidation.

The Second Investigator turned around. "I'll put my stuff in the wardrobe," he said with a slight tremor in his voice. "Feel free to stand around staring into space for a while if it amuses you."

Zeno actually stayed where he was. Emphatically nonchalant, he followed Pete's every move.

Pete was putting his last pair of jeans in the wardrobe drawer when he heard Zeno say: "Are there only second-hand shops where you come from? Or don't your parents have the money for proper clothes?"

"Why are you concerned about my clothes?" Pete straightened up and took a breath.

"You've got no style."

"That's my style. I'm from Los Angeles. Los Angeles... Hollywood... sun and sea. Does that mean anything to you? It's that laid-back city on the coast."

Zeno narrowed his eyes and posed when suddenly there was a knock on the door. Zeno opened it and Jupiter was there.

"Are you all right, Pete?" the First Investigator asked.

Relieved, Pete slammed the wardrobe door shut. "It's good that you came, Jupe. I need some fresh air. It's pretty oppressive in here."

Pete locked the wardrobe and the two friends left the residential building. They decided to check out the school facilities and the classrooms. Although they were walking along the main path, there was nobody around.

“Is your roommate also such an arrogant scumbag?” asked Pete.

“Kisho? He seems all right,” Jupiter said. “A Japanese guy. He just came from sports. What’s wrong with Zeno?”

“Pretty aggressive,” said Pete. “He’s acting like a big shot, and the room’s full of some swordsmen pictures. He seems to be one of the guys the girl in the shop was talking about.”

“You mean the members of the Samurai Club,” Jupiter said. “Percy was one of them too. That’s what Kisho said.”

“What are they about?”

“It’s a bunch of guys who idolize old Japanese swordsmen, but let’s read what the school principal wrote first.”

The two of them sat down on a bench. Jupiter took the letter out of his pocket and opened it.

Dear Jupiter and Pete,

Welcome to Shadow Stone. Unfortunately, I have been unexpectedly called to a meeting with the school’s Board of Trustees. I hope to be back the day after tomorrow. In the meantime, my assistant, Hector Fujiwara, will help you until I get back. Don’t do anything dangerous, and most of all, please keep our arrangements to yourselves.

*Best regards,
T Yukawa*

“Nothing more than what we already know,” Jupiter remarked.

“—Except keep the arrangements to ourselves,” Pete said.

“Yes... which is obvious,” the First Investigator said and pocketed the letter.

“There’s one thing I noticed,” Pete said. “When I was unpacking my stuff into the wardrobe, I noticed that there was nothing in there. The desk was also empty. That suggests to me that Percy had taken away all of his things.”

“Hmm...” Jupe mumbled. “That could mean that he ran away as suspected by the police, rather than him being abducted... but it still could be anything. We cannot be sure at the moment... Anyway, let’s go!”

They got up and walked to the classroom building. In the study room, a few younger students were sitting and working, otherwise the place was empty.

Suddenly something buzzed in Jupiter’s pocket. “Bummer!” he muttered. “I can’t be seen using the phone here.”

They ran back outside and hid behind one of the bushes a little further away, but the caller had given up by now. Jupiter pressed a button—it had been Bob. Immediately Jupiter called back.

Bob answered immediately. “Hi, Jupe. How are you?”

“Everything is okay so far. Unfortunately, Pete had to hand in his mobile phone. When you called him, we were sitting with the deputy school principal...”

“I thought you were intelligent enough to put it on silent mode. Anyway, I just wanted to give you a quick report. This whole hotel here is pretty empty. It seems to be busier on weekends because that’s when a few parents come to visit their sons at school during the day.

“Currently, there is only one man here. I guess he’s around forty, and I found him to be pretty strange. The most striking thing about him was his hairstyle. He had shaved all his hair in front. On the rest of his head he had let his hair grow long and tied it into a braid at the back.”

“The samurai used to have this hairstyle,” Jupiter said. “They are traditional Japanese warriors. Did that man speak to you?”

“When he saw me, he wanted to know what I was doing here.”

“So, what did you say?”

“I’m Mandy’s friend and I’m visiting her.” Bob laughed. “I guess he believed me.”

“Maybe you can find out something about him,” Jupiter suggested.

“Sure thing, Captain... and take care of yourselves.”

Bob put his mobile phone away and thought about his situation. Somehow he had to find some trace of Percy and had no idea how to start. Then there was this strange guest, but at least now, thanks to Jupiter, he knew what that strange hairstyle was about.

Bob sat around in his room for a while, and then decided to go and see Mandy. The shop was not too far away by foot, and Mandy was the only bright spot in this town.

A few minutes later, he was walking along the sandy road that led to the rusty Chrysler. Then he turned off to the main street of Danville, and after a short time, he reached the shop.

With a whimsical greeting on his lips, he opened the door... but the phrase stuck in his throat because at the counter was the strange guest from the hotel. He was talking to Mandy. The man had heard him entering, interrupted his conversation, and looked at Bob.

“Ah, there’s your friend,” he said and gave Bob a piercing look. “Well, I’ll be on my way.” He smiled thinly and turned away from Mandy.

Involuntarily, Bob took a step to the side. The man walked past him and left the shop. A strange perfume scent hung in the air.

Bob looked at Mandy.

“So you’re my boyfriend,” she said. “I’m glad I know that now.”

“Uh... I’m sorry,” Bob said. “That was... that... I’ll explain later. Did he ask about me?”

Mandy nodded. “Yes, he wanted to know why my boyfriend was staying in a hotel and not with me. What do you say to something like that? Is it because we’re having a fight? Or because he’s not my boyfriend? Because he’s full of nonsense?”

Bob was annoyed. How a simple excuse could become so tricky so quickly. “So what did you reply?” he asked.

“Nothing. That’s when you walked into the shop.”

“The guy ran into me at the hotel and was so curious. The friend thing was just a line from me. I’m really sorry. Do you know him?”

“Yes, that was Mr Sadamori from San Francisco. He is the craftsman who makes samurai swords for the school.”

“I suppose he’s also the one who made those wooden replicas you sell here.”

Mandy nodded. “Like I told you earlier, he makes both the real sharp ones and the wooden replicas.”

“Is he here often?”

“About two or three times a year. This time, though, he’s booked in at my uncle’s hotel until next week... otherwise he only comes for a day or two.”

“How long has he been in Danville?”

“Since the day before yesterday. Hey! Is this an interrogation or what? Actually, you owe me an explanation.”

Bob nodded. “You’ll get it, I promise... but first, do you have any ice cream?”

“Yes, there in the freezer.”

“What tastes really good?”

“California Blue.”

Bob went to the freezer, took out a tub and paid for it. “For you, Mandy,” he then said and gave her the ice cream.

“—But that’s not enough,” Mandy replied and smiled. “You still owe me an explanation.”

5. 戦士の道 The Way of the Warriors

Jupiter had hidden his mobile phone well again. “I don’t like that strange guest at the hotel at all,” he said. “I hope Bob is careful.”

“If anyone is careful, it’s Bob,” Pete said, “but let’s finish inspecting the grounds first. We haven’t seen the sports hall yet.”

“The sports hall is, of course, of burning interest to you, Pete.” Jupiter grinned and they set off.

By now, it was approaching sunset. A chilly mountain breeze swept across the school grounds. Juve and Pete found the sports hall unlit and locked. They then walked past the student lockers, making their way around the building to check out the athletics facilities. There too, was devoid of activity, with only an empty sports field stretching before them.

Just as they were about to turn back, they heard a strange noise. It sounded like a short command. More curt shouts followed. They were unintelligible, seemingly in another language. Then blows echoed—cold and wooden.

Pete grabbed Jupiter by the arm. “What is that?” he asked. Without another word, they crept towards the direction from which the shouts came.

Moments later, they were out in the open terrain, down a slight dip. Dense and tall bushes blocked the view. Suddenly a faint glimmer of light penetrated the branches and they saw shadowy movements. The noise grew louder.

Juve was about to push ahead when Pete pulled him back by the jacket. “I don’t know,” the Second Investigator whispered. “This is creepy.”

Jupiter, however, shook his head and kept going on. Pete followed him at a little distance. Branches crackled under their feet. Jupiter finally slowed down for Pete to catch up with him. Then the bushes gave way to a clear view.

At first, the Second Investigator thought he was watching a meeting of creepy forest orcs. Two figures were going at each other, their faces covered by frightening masks. A helmet shone dully on their heads and ghostly-looking robes fluttered on their bodies. They struck each other with wooden swords. In a semi-circle around them, other figures stood and watched the sword fight. Three torches burned between them, casting a ghostly illumination on the scene.

A man stood a little way off from the group. He didn’t wear a mask and was dressed all in black. Every now and then he called out a command to the warriors. A branch obstructed Jupiter’s view and he bent it to the side. The wooden swords clashed again and again. The spectators cheered.

Suddenly one of them shouted something and pointed in the direction where Jupiter and Pete were hiding. The warriors interrupted their fight and turned around. They raised their swords threateningly and strode forward to where the two investigators were hiding.

“Get out of here!” Pete hissed and pulled Jupiter by the arm.

However, Jupiter held Pete back. “We haven’t done anything wrong here.”

“They won’t care! I don’t feel like getting a sword like that on my head.”

The two warriors were already using their weapons to slash their way through the bushes... and they were getting closer and closer.

"Get out of here!" Pete hissed a second time. With a powerful blow, the swordsman in front swept a branch aside, and then he was there.

He pointed his weapon at Jupiter's chest. "What are you doing here?" The second swordsman then appeared and took on Pete. The point of the sword poked him in the pit of the stomach.

"You're the babies!" he shouted in amazement. Pete tried to push the sword away, but the swordsman held it very firmly.

"If I'm not mistaken, you are with the Samurai Club," the First Investigator said calmly, "and please take this pointy thing off me. I won't hurt you."

"We don't like being watched," said the first swordsman, threatening Jupiter. "Everyone knows that."

"We are new here," Jupiter replied. The swordsman's voice sounded familiar to him. "We're sorry. We didn't know that. My friend Pete is interested in you guys. He would love to join your club."

Jupiter quickly gave Pete a look to urge him to express that he was sorry. Pete swallowed a reply. He would have something to say to Jupiter about this turn of events.

"Can't he speak for himself?" asked the swordsman standing with Pete.

Pete nodded compulsively. In the meantime, the man dressed in black had approached.

"You must be Mr Fender," Jupiter greeted him, "the sports teacher who runs the Samurai Club."

"That's right, and you are the new students on an orientation programme," Mr Fender said. "I apologize if you felt threatened. We samurai members like to be among ourselves. The other students of Shadow Stone respect that... Did I just hear that one of you wants to join us?"

Reluctantly, Pete raised his hand. "Uh... that should be me."

"Well, it's not that simple," Mr Fender said. "I'll have to interview you first. Come to me tomorrow after lunch... and now please let us get on with our practice. I wish you a pleasant night."

Jupiter and Pete nodded. That was a clear message.

"See you later, Sena!" said Jupiter to one of the swordsmen. The First Investigator had recognized Sena by his voice and he wanted him to know that. Sena remained silent.

Then the two investigators started on their way back.

"Where did you get this stupid idea that I want to join those crazy people?" Pete asked when they had left the remote bush area behind them.

Jupe had the answer ready by now: "This way you might be able to find out something about Percy's disappearance. It's striking, isn't it—he stayed with Zeno, who's in the Samurai Club, and somehow they're a very strange group."

"Maybe Percy just ran away because of a girl... or because he had trouble with a teacher."

"Could be," Jupiter murmured.

"What is the samurai all about?" asked Pete. "I need to have some idea so that tomorrow I'll know what I'm so interested in..."

Now Jupiter was in his element. He was, after all, a walking encyclopaedia. "The word is of Japanese origin," he explained. "The samurai came from a long line of warriors that served the emperor for many centuries. They were very well-trained fighters who mastered swordsmanship, archery, and other techniques. They were above the ordinary people and had

developed their own way of living and thinking that..." He suddenly paused. "Well, perhaps we should look for the school's library, and if it is still open, we can find out more."

"I wish Bob were here."

"Right... you have to do the research yourself," Jupiter said. "Come on, we'll go together."

They walked over to the classroom building. The lights were still on in some rooms. Jupiter asked a boy about the library. It was still open. As he had expected, there was a lot of literature about the samurai.

Jupiter and Pete chose several titles, sat down at a table and leafed through the books. They found an abundance of information.

After an hour, Pete lost interest. "That's enough. I'm prepared for the interview with Mr Fender."

"Best to tell him you're fascinated by the fighting techniques and their strict code of honour and philosophy."

"Huh?"

"Well, how the samurai thought, how they imagined life, their rules and their behaviour—loyalty, courage, honour, and also charity."

"Uh-huh... I'll think of something. I think I'll concentrate on the fighting part."

The First Investigator grinned. "That's certainly more believable coming from you, but don't overdo it with your enthusiasm. After all, the samurai had a licence to kill. If a citizen did not treat him with the necessary respect, he was free to take action... including manslaughter."

Suddenly Pete had the image in his mind's eye of the two samurai warriors coming at them with their swords. It had been very threatening. "Then we'd better not provoke the samurai boys too much..."

"Oh, Pete, that was hundreds of years ago," Jupiter said. He looked at his watch. It was late and they were alone in the library by now. According to the rules of the school, they should have been in their rooms long ago. Soon, the lights would be switched off. "Come on, Pete, let's go!"

As they were putting the books away, the door opened. It was Mr Crowe, the caretaker, apparently doing his rounds.

A rattling laugh rang out. "Gotcha! Closing time, boys! You young punks don't know your way around Shadow Stone yet, huh? But you'll all learn."

"We're getting out of here," Pete said and tried to push past him, but Crowe grabbed Pete's arm.

"You don't know what that means?" he hissed and let his bad teeth show. "You broke curfew! One hour in Crowe's torture chamber! Report to me tomorrow after breakfast."

The two investigators screwed up their faces and left the building.

"I envy Bob more and more," Pete said when they were alone again. "—Especially when I imagine that this evening isn't over yet..."

"Right now, I guess we have to prepare for the baby shower—whatever that is, right?"

Pete screwed up his face. "If only this were over already."

"It won't be that bad, and I promise you—if they come at us too hard, there will be retaliation."

Pete was taken aback. "That's a whole new thing coming from you. Since when do you want to retaliate?"

"It doesn't always have to be physical retaliation," Jupiter said. "I just don't like to back down."

"The bad thing is that you and I are in different rooms," Pete grumbled.

"Then come with me to my room for a moment."

They went into Jupiter's room. Kisho was already lying in bed and reading a book. When he saw Jupiter and Pete, he looked up.

Pete liked him immediately—not only because of his smartly cut hair, but especially because of his warm, friendly look.

"Hi, Pete," Kisho said. "Jupiter has told me about you."

"Hi."

"I hope they don't treat you too badly tonight."

"Who will come to us anyway?" asked Pete.

"Most of the time it's the boys from the Samurai Club. They always act like they're the greatest. Just stay out of their way."

"That should be difficult for me," said Pete. "I stay with someone like that."

"My sympathies," Kisho said, "but you'd better go to your room. It's getting late. If old Crowe catches you, you'll get some nasty tongue-lashing from him."

Pete nodded. "We've already met him. He invited us into his torture chamber, whatever that is."

"Oh, that number! He scared me with that at first. It's not so bad. Crowe manages a lot of old Japanese artefacts—swords and other war stuff. He keeps them clean by picking up students who break the rules, but all you have to do is to clean, clean, and clean all that stuff that he has."

It reminded Pete of Aunt Mathilda and he had to smile against his will. He said goodbye and ran to his room. In the hallway, only a dim emergency light was still shining.

When he opened the door to his room, he was startled. Zeno was not there. His bed was untouched. Shrugging, Pete grabbed his toiletries and went into the toilet. Even when he came back, Zeno had not returned.

Pete made his bed, grabbed a book and lay down, but after three pages, he realized that he couldn't remember a line of the crime novel. His thoughts were constantly wandering. What would those samurai boys do to him tonight? Was it really right to join their club? And then this school—he didn't like the whole atmosphere. There was a strange pressure on everything. It reeked of violence. What had really happened to Percy?

Fifteen minutes later, Zeno was still not back. Pete threw the book aside and stood up. He slipped on his jeans and T-shirt, took his flashlight from his bag and crept into the hallway. It was better to roam around outside than to be surprised by those masked warriors.

The night lights illuminated the hallway just enough to see the room numbers. It was quiet. Most of the students were on vacation. The few who were there were asleep, or at least pretending to be, so they wouldn't be caught by Crowe. Nevertheless, Zeno was out somewhere.

When Pete was on the ground floor, he briefly considered asking Jupe to go with him, but he was probably fast asleep. Pete walked through the entrance hall and then stepped outside. The air was fresh and cool. He looked around. No one seemed to be out there.

There was a place here that haunted the Second Investigator's mind—the small tower. Sena had said that it was 'forbidden'.

A long cloud passed in front of the moon and swallowed the already sparse view. Pete switched on his flashlight. He had roughly memorized the direction to the forbidden tower.

Cautiously, Pete started walking. The path led around some sharp-edged bushes that blocked his view of the tower. After a few metres, Pete was overcome by doubts. Maybe it was not a good idea to venture there alone after all. His steps became slower and he was

about to turn around when he suddenly heard a strange noise. Pete faltered and turned his flashlight in the appropriate direction. He was startled. A pair of eyes was staring at him.

Only then did Pete recognize the animal. It was a cat. It was crouching in a tree. He realized that Jupiter and Bob were right about him being just too jumpy. Anyway, he decided to continue on to the tower now.

The cat jumped to the ground and disappeared into the darkness, and Pete set off determinedly. After a short time, he was at his destination.

In front of him stood the forbidden tower set into the broad wall of the castle complex. At the ground level was a heavy wooden door. As he had expected, it was locked, but next to it was a narrow spiral staircase leading up. Pete shone his light up the tower. From where he was standing, there were no windows.

Pete looked around. Everything was quiet. Apparently Crowe had not discovered his night excursion.

6. 禁断の塔 The Forbidden Tower

Pete decided to unravel the mystery of the forbidden tower. He switched off his flashlight and quietly felt his way up the stairs, with each step creaking ominously beneath his weight.

When he got to the rooftop, he leaned forward against the parapet. As the cold wind brushed his face, his heart raced at the breathtaking view of the forests and mountains sprawling before him. In the distance, the few lights of Danville twinkled. Bob had to be there somewhere. He was probably just sitting comfortably with that Mandy, Pete thought bitterly.

However, something was not right here. Below him, there was a faint glow of light falling on the tree tops outside the castle. Pete looked intently and then he saw it—the light came from a small window set into the side of the tower that was not visible from within the castle compound. The window hinted at a secret room, possibly filled with forgotten relics or secrets waiting to be uncovered.

He leaned far over the parapet, but it was not enough to get a glimpse through the window. Every now and then, a shadow flitted past inside... or was it the flickering of candlelight?

Pete focussed and he could hear muffled voices coming from the room. There was someone there! Could the room be a prison? With his hand, Pete sought a better hold on the parapet. He had to be careful that his centre of gravity did not shift too far outwards to lose his balance. The top of the tower must have been a good six or seven metres above the ground, and what awaited him at the bottom could not be seen in the darkness.

The language sounded foreign—probably Japanese. Then Pete also picked up some English words—“faithful”... “be ready”... A few shouts were heard.

Suddenly the light went out. Pete crept to the other side of the rooftop to look out over the Shadow Stone compound. If a secret assembly had been taking place in the room, the members should be leaving the tower through the wooden door at ground level... but strangely enough, the door was not opened. Nothing happened. Everything remained quiet.

Pete waited a few minutes, then, perplexed, he decided to retreat. Carefully he stepped down the spiral staircase. When he had descended halfway down, he thought he heard a noise from inside. It sounded like a clang. So someone was still there.

He paused, but everything remained silent again. Perhaps he had been mistaken. After a few moments, he continued walking down. Only when he had the ground under his feet did he switch on his flashlight.

His thirst for adventure was quenched for now, and he was freezing. Tomorrow he would tell Jupiter about the strange voices, but now he wanted to get back to his bed.

Maybe the boys who had wanted to play a trick on him had simply disappeared after finding his bed empty. It was a very vague hope, but it distracted Pete so much that he noticed far too late the footsteps that had been following him for a few moments.

When he finally heard them close behind him, his first impulse was to run, but by then a heavy hand was already resting on his shoulder. Pete's heart sank. A light flashed and a nasty laugh rang out.

“Pete Crenshaw! Well, we’ve got ourselves a rascal! Trying to duck out of the baby shower, huh?”

It was Crowe. Pete was almost relieved that the boys with the swords hadn’t got him.

“Yes,” Pete said, and it wasn’t entirely wrong.

“They’ll think of something nice for you! You’ll have to get through this, Crenshaw!” Crowe barked. “Let me tell you one more thing, young man... You’ve got a lot of nerve coming out here this late at night, especially since you broke curfew earlier. I would like very much to give you a second dose of punishment tomorrow... but guess what? It’s your lucky night tonight and because you’re new, I’ll let you off with this infringement... but tomorrow, you and your friend are still due at my torture chamber.” With that, he let out a barrage of laughter.

“Oh, man!” Pete thought to himself. Where in the world would a caretaker take on the role of a discipline master?

Crowe then loosened his grip but left his hand on Pete’s shoulder.

After a few metres, Pete shook himself free. “I can walk on my own, Mr Crowe.”

“Don’t be so stubborn, kid,” the caretaker muttered, but let go of Pete. By now they had reached the residential building. “Pleasant night,” said Crowe. “See you tomorrow!”

Without replying, Pete went into the building. As glad as he was to be rid of the disgusting Crowe, he was now afraid to go into his room.

With a queasy stomach, he crept upstairs and proceeded to the hallway where his room was. There was silence. Quietly the wood creaked under his feet. Carefully, he opened the door to his room. Inside was dark, but from the dim hallway lights, he could make out Zeno lying in his bed. Where had he been? Was he at the strange meeting in the tower? But then how had he got back here so quickly?

Pete didn’t dare turn on the room light. He took his flashlight and shone around. There was nothing suspicious to be seen. “They’re probably just pranksters, and hopefully, they’re asleep by now,” Pete thought to himself.

He crept over to his bed. Something was wrong. A tense silence lay over everything, or was he imagining it? The hairs on the back of his neck stood on end. He paused. Wasn’t there some movement?

The bed! The blanket! Suddenly he knew what was bothering him. The blanket lay neatly tucked in on the mattress. He had not left his bed so neat! And where was his book? Surely Zeno had not made the bed for a worthless boarding school newcomer.

Something was indeed moving! Pete shone his light at a spot on the blanket... and he flinched. A horribly disgusting worm crawled out from under his blanket—heading towards the pillow. Yes, it was a worm—a slimy worm!

Without thinking, Pete bent over and tore the blanket aside. He cried out! That worm was only one of many! What he found was a tangle full of twitching dark bodies that wriggled outwards from the middle of the bed as if they wanted to attack him. He could not take his eyes off them. Something shot up his gullet and Pete retched.

At that moment, a roar of laughter erupted. The door of Zeno’s wardrobe flew open and a masked figure jumped out. Others must have been behind the curtain or somewhere else. There were at least three of them.

The flashlight fell out of Pete’s hand and rolled flickering along the floor. In the zigzag line of light, Pete lost all perspective.

“Pete, you worm!” one of the boys shouted. “Why don’t you get into your bed and join your friends!”

It sounded strangely muffled, and Pete saw that they were wearing samurai masks. They had flashlights with them and were shining beams of light onto his face.

“Get out of here!” said the boy standing in front of him, calmly and firmly. “Get out of here! Or we’ll beat you to a pulp!”

Then Pete received a kick in the side, followed by a second one. They were powerful and painful. Pete turned around and punched one of the boys in the stomach. At the same moment, he knew that had been a mistake as he was outnumbered. One of the bullies managed to hold him down, and a second gave him two hard blows to the stomach area that knocked the wind out of him. The other pushed him away and Pete toppled forward. The edge of a hand hit him in the face and Pete felt a sharp pain in his nose.

Someone shouted something in Japanese. Pete saw that Zeno had stood up and was reaching for something. He shouted something.

For a brief moment, the boys were distracted. That was enough. Pete tore himself away and stumbled out of the door into the hallway.

He dragged himself along the hallway and when he reached the staircase, he clung on to the banister and struggled down. No one seemed to be following him.

Pete reached the ground floor, ran to Jupiter’s room, and yanked open the door. It was brightly lit.

“Pete!” Jupiter stood there staring at him as if he were a ghost. In his hands, he held a plastic bag containing disgusting worms.

7. 勇敢な戦士 Brave Warriors

“Jupe! They were here too? This is really disgusting!”

Jupiter looked at his hands. “Oh, they’re just earthworms. That’s what they wanted to scare me with. They threw them all over me in bed. Then they gave me a few bruises too, but I won’t let that get me down.”

“What did they do to you?” another voice asked. Only now did Pete notice Kisho, who was standing at the window, probably shaking out Jupiter’s bed sheet there.

The Second Investigator turned to him. “Oh hello, Kisho. Same thing as with Jupe—only they gave me a bit more.”

“Your nose is bleeding,” Kisho said and threw the bed sheet onto Jupiter’s bed. Then he handed Pete a tissue for his nose. “They really went for it with you,” he said. “They’re not usually like that until later.” Kisho looked at Pete’s nose. It didn’t seem to be broken.

“Hmm...” The First Investigator went to the window and tossed the earthworms out onto the bushes. “When are they usually like this?”

“—When you push them too far; when you interfere with them too much; if you don’t do what they want... then you get punched in the face. It’s best to stay out of their way. They think they’re the greatest thing on Shadow Stone... what am I saying—the greatest in the whole world! The rest of us are just scum.”

“—And the teachers think it’s good?” asked Pete incredulously.

“They don’t get involved in what they view as trivial matters. For them, the samurai boys concern themselves with meaningful things like history and tradition, and not with computers or television. A few little pranks—that’s no big deal. They don’t even notice the nonsense going around. For the rest of us, a little order would be appreciated. Those samurai boys once broke my finger...” Kisho held out his hand to prove it. One finger looked a little crooked.

“—Just because I supposedly insulted them.”

Jupiter went to him and looked at the finger. “—Even then, no one said anything?”

Kisho shook his head. “They covered it up as a sports accident.”

Pete had listened in dismay. “—And you? You didn’t fight back? Your parents? Anyone outside?”

“No. If you betray these people, they will take revenge—eventually. The Samurai Club in Shadow Stone has been around for a long time, and the members stick together. There are now many alumni members scattered around the world. Most of them are still in contact with each other. They have a network in the outside world that they can use to threaten you with. If you’re on their hit list, then you’re in trouble... or your friends or relatives. At some point, revenge will come.”

“Nasty!” said Pete. “It looks like organized crime to me.”

“As I said, it’s best you stay out of it. Then you won’t have such a bad life here. Not everything is wrong at this school. It’s just that now and then the boys want something from you, so you do it.”

“What do they want?”

“Uh... for example, get out of their way; shine their shoes; hand over valuables or money... those sorts of things.”

“—And you? Didn’t you want to join them?” asked Pete. “You’re Japanese.”

“Just because I’m Japanese? Ha!” Kisho exclaimed. “I have nothing against the samurai tradition, really I don’t. In fact, I respect it. While the samurai as a warrior class no longer exists, their cultural legacy and values remain deeply ingrained in Japanese society. This school was founded on such principles, and that was why I chose to study here.”

“We read up a bit about the samurai being brave warriors in Japan before the industrial era,” Pete said. “Much was said about loyalty, honour, and discipline, but what we have seen here is very different.”

“You’re right, Pete,” Kisho said. “To be fair, outside of that club, the rest of the students and staff—well... perhaps with the exception of Mr Crowe—do in fact adhere to traditional principles.

“However, the antics of the Samurai Club are something else. They are an extremist group who have developed their own skewed version of the tradition by incorporating harmful ideologies and practices that glorify a lifestyle of violence, revenge, manipulation, and supremacy. Such lifestyles should not be in today’s society. I suppose that also answers your earlier question as to why I am not with them.

“In short, the members just want to justify how great they are. To me, they are just pawns in a game orchestrated by someone... but I don’t know who.”

“You’re right, Kisho,” Jupiter said, pinching his lower lip. “Someone has infiltrated the club—probably for a long time, but the cycles of violence have intensified in the past week... Sena is the student leader, isn’t he?”

Kisho nodded.

“Why?”

“He’s the best... besides, he comes from an old rich samurai family.”

“What about Percy? He was one of them too, wasn’t he? Why did he disappear?”

“I don’t know,” Kisho said. “Very little is getting out from those boys.”

“Nevertheless, the rest of you must have talked about it,” Jupiter continued. “Aren’t there any rumours?”

Kisho squirmed. It was obvious that he didn’t like to talk about it. He was probably afraid. Jupiter didn’t take his eyes off him.

“Well,” Kisho finally muttered. “There was that thing scribbled on the wall about Percy being a traitor. They said Percy didn’t want to be part of them anymore. Some people think they... killed him.”

Jupiter and Pete stared at Kisho in disbelief.

“—But I don’t believe that,” Kisho quickly added. “It’s easy to get into trouble if one person spreads a rumour. Maybe they just gave him a little beating and he took off.”

They were silent. Thoughtfully, they put Jupiter’s bed in order. Then Jupiter accompanied Pete to his room. No one was there—not even Zeno.

While they cleaned Pete’s bed together, Pete told Juve about his walk to the forbidden tower, but only the most necessary things. They were both tired from the journey here and the incidents in the evening. Anyway, it was already late.

“If anything else happens tonight, sound the alarm,” Jupiter said. “Then I’ll come help you.”

Pete nodded absent-mindedly.

A few minutes later, Pete was lying in his bed. He switched off the bedside lamp. Tomorrow he would suggest to Jupiter that they drop the case. Although he was afraid and

his wounds hurt, he quickly fell asleep at this thought.

One floor below, Jupe stared into the night with his eyes wide open. It was clear to him that the samurai boys wanted to get rid of him and Pete... but they won't succeed!

Meanwhile, Bob tossed and turned restlessly in bed at his hotel room in Danville.

He didn't know how to get on with the search for Percy. He had asked Mandy about the boys at school. She had only explained non-committally that occasionally some of them came into the shop to buy foodstuffs or magazines. She had nothing to do with any of them, but Bob couldn't quite believe that, with a pretty girl like Mandy.

Bob glanced at the clock. By now it was approaching midnight. He wondered how Jupe and Pete were doing. It had been a stupid idea to leave him here alone. He missed his friends.

Suddenly he heard footsteps in the hallway outside his room. Apart from him, there was only that strange man in the hotel—Mr Sadamori, who looked like an old samurai warrior.

Bob did not think twice. He got out of bed, put on a T-shirt and jeans, slipped on his shoes and then stepped out into the hallway. The scent of perfume was unmistakable. He heard the front door being unlocked downstairs, and then closed back. The samurai had left the hotel. What was he up to in the middle of the night in this sleepy place?

Bob hurried downstairs. Nobody was at the reception counter. Mandy's uncle was probably fast asleep. Cautiously, Bob stepped outside into the fresh air and looked around. The man's footsteps crunched softly on the hard and dry forest path. Just then a large cloud released the moon, and in the pale light, the samurai's shadow was easy to make out.

With short, springy steps, Bob walked towards the sheep pasture. To be on the safe side, he let the distance grow a little before he took up the pursuit.

The path led along the fence of the sheep pasture and then entered the forest where, according to Mandy, it ended at an old mine. By now Bob's eyes had adjusted to the darkness.

The man walked hurriedly without looking back. Now he had reached the forest edge. Bob ran faster so as not to lose sight of him. However, as feared, he could not be seen by the time Bob reached the forest edge.

It was like crossing over into another world. The trees swallowed the meagre moonlight. The bright path was still visible on the ground for a few metres and then lost in the darkness.

Bob paused. A few branches creaked in the light wind, but there was no sign of the man. Bob decided to walk on cautiously, but with every step, the hairs on the back of his neck stood on end. He missed Jupiter and Pete more than before. If something happened to him here, no one would find him anytime soon.

He noticed that the path made a bend. The dark outline of a huge tree trunk appeared. Its gnarled branches looked like they were trying to reach for something.

Bob decided to just check around the bend and then he'll turn back. Step by step he felt his way along. The earth creaked softly under his shoes.

Suddenly, a figure emerged from the outline of the tree. Before Bob could react, the figure was upon him.

Bob felt a hard blow to his head. He slumped to the ground. The last thing he noticed was the intense smell of perfume.

8. 侵入者

The Intruder

Pete slept restlessly. His nose was still in pain, and he had also received blows in other places. He couldn't find a position all night that didn't hurt.

In his dreams, scenes from the evening were mixed with events from Rocky Beach. Suddenly the dream became so violent that he was abruptly awake. After lying there exhausted for a few minutes, Pete reached for his watch. It was five o'clock in the morning.

His eyes fell on Zeno's bed, which was just visible at the other end of the room. It was still empty.

While Pete was wondering what this meant, he heard a noise at the window. It sounded like a light scraping noise. Fortunately, the window was closed.

Cautiously, Pete straightened up. From his bed, he could only look at the window at an angle and hardly make out anything. Was there someone outside the window? ... But he was on the first floor! Then he recalled that there was an extended roof below the window, and someone could have easily climbed up there.

Now Pete was finally awake. He slid to the foot of his bed, from where he could see everything better. He was now very sure that there was someone crouching precariously just outside the window. However, it was impossible to tell who the intruder was. Was it Zeno?

Obviously the intruder was talking to someone else. The whispering voice could be heard but was unintelligible as the window was closed.

Suddenly Pete realized what was going on. The intruder had a mobile phone! A short while later, the phone conversation ended. Pete's muscles tensed. Hopefully it was only Zeno... and not a burglar... otherwise it would be serious. Should he call Jupiter? Or wait to see what would happen?

Suddenly the intruder straightened up, turned around and tampered with the window pane. In an instant, Pete had slipped into a sleeping position, but before he knew it, the intruder had silently pushed the window up. A cold draught flooded into the room. It happened so quickly that Pete could hardly react.

The very next moment, the intruder got down from the window ledge into the room! Pete forced himself to breathe calmly and pretended to be asleep. Then the intruder, who was wearing a hoodie, gently closed the window. He took a quick look at Pete and then crept over to Zeno's empty bed.

So it had to be Zeno after all! The physique matched. The Second Investigator opened his eyes a little wider and saw the boy carefully taking off his shirt. Now he was sure—it was Zeno!

Carefully, Zeno hung his clothes on his chair. Then he lay down on his bed. After a few minutes, he was asleep. Pete could hear his calm, slow breathing.

A thousand questions rushed through Pete's mind. What was Zeno up to? Where had he been? Why did he have a mobile phone? And most importantly, who had he been talking to at such a time? Was it Sena? Pete figured that he could find the answer to some of his questions—through the mobile phone which was still in Zeno's clothes. However, he had to be sure that his roommate was asleep.

The Second Investigator waited for fifteen minutes. Then he carefully pushed his blanket aside and stretched his feet on the floor. As if in slow motion, he crept towards Zeno's chair. He had to be cautious not to be caught, as he would not get off as lightly as he had the night before.

Zeno was quiet and not moving. Now Pete had reached the chair where the clothes were hanging. Carefully, he felt the clothes and found the mobile phone in the jeans pocket. Hopefully Zeno hadn't switched it off.

Pete looked at the sleeping Zeno in the bed for a while. Then he reached to get the mobile phone, but the movement was clumsy. The device slipped out! With a reaction that only Pete could manage, he cushioned the impact with his foot just before landing. Nevertheless, the mobile phone slid on the wooden floor under the chair.

Zeno turned to the side, grunting in his sleep.

Pete remained in his position for a few seconds. Carefully he picked up the mobile phone. The impact had turned on the display light, and in the dim lighting, it seemed almost as bright as a flashlight to Pete.

With shaky fingers, he pressed the phone button and checked the last call. Instantly, the photo of the person who spoke to Zeno appeared.

In shock, Pete almost dropped the device. He swallowed and looked closely at the photo again. Satisfied, he put the phone back into Zeno's jeans pocket.

Pete hurriedly ducked back into his bed. What on earth did Mandy, the nice girl from the Danville shop, have to do with a thug like Zeno?

Three hours later, Pete ran down the stairs, yawning, to meet Jupiter and then go for breakfast together in the dining hall.

Fortunately, during the vacation, breakfast was not served until half past eight, more than an hour later than usual. Zeno was likely to skip it as he was still asleep.

Pete was still tired. Above all, he didn't feel like going to see Mr Fender, who was waiting for him today to interview him on this intention to join the Samurai Club. Besides that, Crowe was also still on the agenda. However, their main task was to solve the mystery of Percy's disappearance—even if Pete toyed with the idea of simply giving up the case.

Jupe greeted him bright and fresh. If he had to, a few hours' sleep was enough for him to recover. Frowning, he looked at Pete's nose. "It looks pretty bad."

"It feels that way too," Pete replied. "I can hardly breathe."

They left the residential building and Pete told Jupiter what he had discovered earlier that morning.

The First Investigator listened to him attentively. "Since Zeno has contact with Mandy, we have to warn Bob," he said. "It's best if I call him right now."

However, the timing was bad. Several samurai boys came towards them. Their posture was stiff and weighty, as if they had swallowed one of their wooden swords.

As they came closer, Jupiter and Pete recognized Sena among them.

"Him again," Pete muttered and wanted to slip away into a side path, but Jupiter pulled him back. "Keep going straight," he urged.

As they crossed paths, one of the boys dropped something. It looked like a heavily used tissue.

Suddenly, Sena grabbed Pete's arm, grinning. "You've dropped something there, worm!"

"That wasn't mine!" Pete slipped out, but at the same moment, he realized that it was pointless.

“We all saw it, you clown,” Sena said. The others nodded.

The First Investigator looked at the boys’ faces. Their expressions ranged from disparaging and arrogant to open hostility.

Jupiter cleared his throat and put as much contempt as possible in his voice. “You’re pretty blind for a samurai police force! Pick up your own filth!” He laughed and pulled Pete by the sleeve. “Come on, let’s go!”

“Shut your cheeky mouth, fatso!” Sena warned Jupiter. “—Or we’ll deflate you.”

“I know you are stronger than us,” Jupiter said calmly. “Sure, you can beat us up. Sure, we’re silly, but we’re still right. Come on, Pete!”

However, two of the samurai boys ran up to the two investigators and stood threateningly in their way. Pete swallowed. Altogether, there were five of them. His first impulse was to run away. Last night’s beating was enough for him.

At that moment, he heard the loud “Hello!” of an adult. It was Mr Hector, and he was coming down the path. “What’s the commotion about?” he asked curiously.

“The new guy just threw his dirty tissue on the ground,” Sena said, pointing at Pete. “—Now he refuses to pick it up.”

Mr Hector spotted the tissue and looked at Pete. “You still have to get used to our rules, Crenshaw,” he said before Pete or Jupe could say anything in reply. “We value cleanliness. Please pick it up and throw it in the bin... and the rest of you, no assembly please! Move along!”

As the boys grinned their way away, Pete grabbed the sticky tissue with pointed fingers under Mr Hector’s gaze. The nearest litter bin was not until they reached the dining hall.

“Believe it or not,” Pete said to Jupiter as he carried the tissue disgustedly in front of him. “I’m almost more afraid of these guys than the criminals we usually hunt. Another night like this and you can deliver me to the loony bin.”

“Fortunately, our stay here is limited in time,” Jupiter replied, “otherwise we would indeed have a lot to deal with. Maybe things will calm down a bit if you join the Samurai Club.”

“Jupe, are you dreaming? They hate me.”

Pete was right, of course. Jupiter then said: “—But I want to know why they are doing this.”

“I don’t.”

“They hate us because we are new,” Jupiter reflected, “and because we don’t submit to them... but that alone can’t be it. Perhaps they want to get rid of us... because we are too curious.”

“You are curious about absolutely everything under the sun,” Pete remarked.

“Perhaps this quote will interest you: ‘Curiosity will conquer fear even more than bravery will’—so says the Irish novelist, James Stephens.”

“Yeah, sure,” Pete replied, “but curiosity also killed the cat—so says everyone else.”

“We’re not cats.”

“Frankly, what would I do without you?”

They had reached the dining hall and joined a group of regular students who showed them how breakfast worked and what happened to the dirty dishes afterwards.

The students kept a cautious distance from Jupiter and Pete—on the one hand, friendly and curious; on the other hand, not really daring to approach them—possibly because of two other students who were sitting at a neighbouring table and watching everything. They had their two wooden practice swords leaning against the wall—which meant that they were obviously members of the Samurai Club.

When they had finished eating and cleared away the dishes, Jupiter and Pete reported to Mr Crowe for punitive duty. The caretaker had earlier told them to meet him at the reception counter.

When the boys arrived, Crowe was already there. Grumbling, he ushered them along an inconspicuous hallway which led to a staircase down to the basement. There was a storeroom with office furniture. Jupiter and Pete paused and looked at the stuff but quickly lost interest in the mess. However, they spotted a stack of slatted frames placed next to a metal door. Although there was no signboard there, the two boys suspected that it could be the entrance to the boiler room.

Crowe turned around and waved to them to hurry up. He walked further till he reached two wooden doors. He took out a key and opened the left door. The two boys then found themselves in another storeroom. On the walls hung old Japanese weapons such as long swords, short swords, daggers, bows, and shields. In another section of the storeroom stood mannequins draped in samurai robes and colourful shimmering armour.

"This is the Samurai Club's storeroom," Crowe explained and pointed to a table on which lay several pieces of samurai gear. "I hope you know how to clean metal."

They nodded as they were familiar with this activity at the salvage yard.

Crowe then handed them cleaning materials. "Some of these are historical weapons, so be careful," he said. "One of you take this sword and the other, this helmet. Clean them properly, and in one hour you may go back out."

Crowe had barely left the room and locked the door when Jupiter pulled out his mobile phone to call Bob, but after a few seconds, he looked at his phone in disappointment. "Bummer! No reception down here." He put the phone back in his jacket pocket and comfortably put his legs up on the table.

"We'll wait then." Jupiter had a look on his face like Uncle Titus after work in the evening in front of the television. All that was missing was a glass of beer.

"We'd better do something," Pete said, "otherwise we'll only get into more trouble with Crowe."

"So, are you going to wield the cleaning rag for that stupid codger?" Jupiter asked.

Indecisively, Pete shrugged his shoulders.

"Nope!" Jupiter said and stood up. "Not me!" He took one of the swords from the table and examined it in the light of the ceiling lamp. "The metal's tarnished. It'll take forever to scrub it clean."

He looked around until he spotted a similar sword on the wall, went to the spot and simply swapped the swords. "This one is perfect... looking at how it shines. It must have been cleaned recently." He placed it on the table in front of Pete. "For you..." He did the same with the tarnished helmet. "Done!" he said and grinned.

Pete would have preferred to follow Crowe's order and clean the sword. He looked around anxiously. Hopefully Crowe was not watching them and discover the deception.

"Let's use the time here and look around," Jupiter suggested.

9. 影石の伝説 The Legend of Shadow Stone

Jupiter and Pete first looked at the weapons on the wall. There were several kinds of swords—real sharp steel ones and wooden practice weapons. In any case, they quickly lost interest and turned to the armoured samurai mannequins. Under their helmets they wore frightening masks.

Next, Jupiter went over to a small glass cabinet that was placed next to an antique cupboard. He waved Pete over. “Here’s a more detailed write-up of the legend of Shadow Stone, along with a photo of the school’s founder.”

Together they bent over the glass and looked at the black and white photo of an Asian man who was looking into the camera with a calm but stony expression. The accompanying text revealed that the founder, Riku Nishimura, came from an old samurai family in Japan. He migrated to the US and later became a millionaire.

Jupiter skimmed the text. “When he was young, Nishimura had a friend named Taro Kageishi, who came from another samurai family. One day they fought over a certain Golden Sword. In the process, an accident happened. At one point, Kageishi tried a feint as he was determined to win. For a brief moment, he lost control of his movement and fell into a ravine. Nishimura could not save him... The scene of the accident must be near here.” Jupiter pointed to a photograph. It showed a rocky plateau directly above a ravine.

“Although he was not to be blamed, the terrible event devastated the survivor. It wouldn’t let him go. To make up for it, he eventually bought this castle located near the site and founded the school. He named it ‘Shadow Stone’—not after the school’s shadowy location as you might think—but after his friend... as ‘*kageishi*’ means ‘shadow stone’ in Japanese.

“He donated the Golden Sword to the school and stipulated that the history of the samurai remain an important theme at the school. Sword fights are held annually on Open Day to commemorate the events on the plateau.”

“Great,” said Pete. “When is that day?”

“When the new school year begins.”

“That’s soon? Come now, Juve, Crowe will show up in a minute.”

Jupiter and Pete sat back down at the table and wiped some of the pungent-smelling cleaning agent onto the sword and helmet for show.

After a few minutes, they heard the door being unlocked. The caretaker appeared and shuffled over to them, giggling.

“Let’s see then.” Sniffing, he first lifted the sword and checked it. “Not bad, my boy, you may come more often.” Jupiter’s helmet also went through without a hitch.

Pete gave Jupiter an appreciative look. He was impressed by his friend’s self-confident attitude in the face of the samurai boys’ taunts and Crowe’s gruffness. Alone, he would have long since died of fear. It was good to have such a friend.

When they were at the door, Crowe ordered them to stop. “I’ve got to check you out, boys—just to be sure that you are not smuggling out any of the valuable weapons...”

First he patted down Juve, then Pete. Crowe’s greasy hands made him uncomfortable.

Satisfied, Crowe let out a chuckle and pushed them out. “I hope you will come and work here again...”

As soon as they were outside, Jupiter looked for a place where he could call Bob undisturbed and warn him about Zeno’s connection to Mandy. There was too much going on in the school, so the two investigators ducked behind the sports hall. At last, they had some peace.

A ledge in the wall offered enough space for two. Jupiter switched on his mobile phone and waited until it had established a connection. The signal was very weak. In any case, Jupiter turned on the speakerphone for Pete to listen in and then dialled Bob’s number.

After some ringing, Bob picked up. A girl could be heard in the background. “Hi, Juve, I’m glad you called, but wait... I need to go into the next room.”

Jupiter held the phone away and rolled his eyes. “He’s with Mandy! That’s not what I mean by researching.”

“It depends,” Pete said with a grin.

“Cut the nonsense, Pete! Wait... Yes, Bob?”

“Now we can talk,” Bob said through the mobile phone.

“Unfortunately, you can’t do that!” Juve and Pete turned around, startled. The voice was ice-cold.

There stood Mr Fender. Out of nowhere he had appeared. “Give me that mobile phone! They are prohibited here. Don’t tell me you didn’t know that.”

“What’s going on?” Bob called out.

“I’m confiscating your mobile phone!” Mr Fender said loudly and grabbed the phone. Into the phone he said: “I’m afraid this call is over! Your friend can call you from the phone booth.”

Then the teacher switched the device off. “I’ll leave this at the security office,” he said. “When you leave the school, you can get it back. Now, move along!”

Mr Fender left and walked to the sports hall. Jupiter and Pete stood up and headed in the opposite direction.

“It’s the phone booth then,” Jupiter said, “but in a controlled place like this, the landline is bound to be tapped. Besides, the booths are open, and anyone nearby can listen in on what you’re saying... What I’m wondering, though, is where did Mr Fender come from so suddenly?”

As they turned the corner of the sports hall, a few metres away, Sena was standing among the trees, grinning challengingly at them. It was clear what this meant—Sena had been watching them and ratted them out.

Shaking his head, Bob switched off his mobile phone. He went back to the lobby of the Wilbury Hotel where Mandy was waiting for him. The girl’s visit had cheered him up, although his head was still buzzing.

When he had arrived back at the hotel last night, it was half past one. That meant that he couldn’t have been lying unconscious in the forest for very long when Mandy had found him and taken him back to the hotel.

“Well, that was a short conversation,” Mandy said when Bob sat down with her again.

“The call was interrupted,” Bob replied curtly. “I haven’t properly thanked you for saving me yesterday.”

Mandy smiled at him. “‘Saving’ is probably a bit of an exaggeration. I would rather say ‘helped you back here’. You were sitting under that tree holding your head. What were you

doing in the forest in the middle of the night?”

“I could ask you the same thing,” Bob said.

They exchanged glances, realizing that they each had a secret. A brief moment of silence passed as they contemplated just how much they were willing to reveal.

“I...”

“I...”

They laughed.

“I wanted to meet someone,” Mandy said.

“—And I’ve been following someone,” Bob said, “—the man who stays here in the hotel. Would that be the same person you were wanting to meet?”

Mandy laughed and shook her head. “No, of course not. I was out there to meet someone who is much younger—a boy. We missed each other.”

“Ah!” A love story, then. Bob was almost a little disappointed.

“By the way, yesterday you promised me an explanation, but I believe you haven’t told me everything yet,” Mandy said. “I’d love to know what you’re really doing here... in Danville—Jupiter, Pete and you.”

Bob looked into her eyes for seconds. “We’re looking for Percy Watson,” he then said.

At 11:30 am, Jupiter and Pete attended a vacation course given by Mr Hector. The atmosphere among the few students was relaxed, but there were two groups. Jupiter and Pete joined Kisho and his friends. Further forward sat the samurai boys.

It was a lesson on chemistry. While Jupiter knew more than what the lesson was about, Pete couldn’t be bothered. His mind was off on vacation somewhere else; his nose was still hurting; and his stomach was longing for lunch.

An hour later, it was lunchtime, and that passed without further incidents. Jupiter offered to help with the washing up, while Pete proceeded to Mr Fender’s room to talk to him about joining the Samurai Club.

The sports teacher’s office was right next to Mr Hector’s room. With a sinking feeling in his stomach, Pete knocked.

“Come in!”

The Second Investigator entered and looked around in surprise. The room was almost bare. There were only a few pieces of furniture, obviously all of Japanese origin. The walls were whitewashed. A few pictures decorated the room. Japanese symbols could be seen on them. Pete recognized a few that he had noticed in his reading about the samurai.

Mr Fender pointed to a chair that stood in front of his empty desk. “Have a seat.”

“Thank you.”

“So, Crenshaw... you’re interested in the samurai? Always have been?”

“In a way, yes.” Pete then rambled on and on about his supposed interest in ancient cultures.

Fender listened to him with a hard-to-interpret expression. His short-cropped hair, presumably dyed black, and his Japanese robes contrasted strangely with his pale, freckled face.

“What do you hope to achieve by joining the club?” asked Fender.

“I want to be a brave fighter,” said Pete. He tried to remember what Jupiter had said and told rather incoherently about the honour of the samurai and the ingenious fighting techniques.

“The samurai is something special,” Mr Fender explained, “and here at this school, they certainly are. I have trained reliable and honourable boys who would walk through fire for each other. We are very committed to the tradition, and we don’t want anyone who is not.”

“I know, Mr Fender,” The Second Investigator hurried to say.

“I don’t want anyone who is just into weapons. I don’t want any fighting freaks! It’s more about the inner attitude.”

“I understand, Mr Fender.”

“This also includes following the rules.”

“I’m sorry about the mobile phone,” Pete said.

“I heard you were trying to sneak one in too.”

Pete nodded guiltily.

“It’s not the best start to Shadow Stone,” Mr Fender said. “All right. You are only here for a few days, so you won’t learn much.”

Pete nodded. “Yes, Mr Fender... but for the choice of my future school, the samurai are of great importance. It’s precisely such traditions that make schools like this stand out from others.”

Mr Fender looked at him thoughtfully for a moment. “Okay,” he relented. “Come with me later. We have a practice session next to the ravine today—sword and all. Let’s see how you do...”

Pete swallowed. Then he remembered that he should be excited. “Fine, Mr Fender,” he said, smiling wryly. “Thank you!”

10. 剣術の練習 Sword Practice

Half an hour later, Pete was to go to the meeting point as agreed with Mr Fender. He did not feel good.

In the meantime, Jupiter had decided to go to Danville to meet Bob. Not only because he distrusted telephones, but also because he simply wanted to speak directly with Bob. Out of necessity, Pete had lent Jupiter his MG.

When Pete stepped outside the gate of the school, he was relieved to see that Mr Fender was already there. Although Pete did not trust him, he felt safer in his presence than he would have if he had to face the samurai boys alone. After all, Mr Fender was a teacher who had to make sure that nothing bad happened to the students.

“For those who don’t know him yet—this is Pete Crenshaw,” Fender announced to the others. “He is here to watch us today. Maybe he’ll join us at the school next semester.”

Fender then introduced the samurai boys. Of course, Pete already knew Zeno and Sena, who gave him a withering look. To the others, Pete nodded darkly. At least two of them had grilled him the night before, but they had their masks on then. Today they had come in plain training clothes.

Each of them had a wooden practice sword strapped around their bodies. Mr Fender, however, carried two weapons. Why that was so was about to become clear—he handed a sword to Pete.

“For a little trial... later,” the teacher said.

“Thank you,” Pete said and accepted the finely crafted wooden sword. He was certain that such a weapon could cause serious injuries, even though it was made of wood.

Then the group left the school’s gate. First they walked along the outside of the wall and later into the forest. After about fifteen minutes of walking through wooded and rocky terrain, they reached a small plateau framed by boulders on the left and right. Pete had a feeling about where he was—the plateau where the legendary sword fight took place between the school’s founder and his friend.

“This is a historic site for Shadow Stone,” Mr Fender explained solemnly. “This is where the founder of the school, Riku Nishimura, had a deadly sword fight with a friend. Today we are practising our exhibition fights here for Open Day.”

Mr Fender pointed at Zeno. “Let your roommate have a look into the abyss.” Zeno nodded to Pete and the two walked carefully to the edge of the cliff.

Pete took a breath. It was a steep and deep downward slope. At the bottom, maybe eighty metres down, a small stream wound its way through the valley. On the opposite side, the rocks rose to a ridge that led high above them to the central peak of the mountain. The sun was above the ridge, bathing the plateau in bright light.

“Impressive, isn’t it?” Mr Fender said.

He then instructed Pete and one of the boys to put up the safety net. It was in a longitudinal metal box set into the side of a rock. By means of two recessed handles, the cover was opened to get the net. The boy showed Pete how to stretch the net between the rocks, close to the edge of the cliff.

When they were finished, Fender pointed to a line marked on the ground, a good metre in front of the net. “Here is what we call the ‘death zone’. The exercise is to force both the opponent’s feet in there, but no further. We have the net for emergencies. Every year there is a competition for which we are practising today.”

At first, Pete only had to watch. The boys fought in pairs with their swords until the better of them had forced the other into the death zone. Fender pitted opponents of roughly equal abilities against each other. The last pair was Sena and Zeno.

With a slight nod, they acknowledged each other, their eyes locked in an intense gaze, ready to unleash fury. The air crackled with tension as they circled one another. With an explosive burst, they launched into action. Blades clashed with the fierce sound of wood striking wood. Each movement was a breathtaking combination of strategy and strength. They weaved intricate patterns around one another, feigning strikes and parrying swift blows.

Even without much knowledge, Pete could see that both were technically excellent—in attack and defence. Of course, one was not allowed to hurt the opponent, but this required a lot of experience and good timing.

For a long time, the fight went back and forth. Sweat beads appeared on the fighters’ brows as they pushed their limits. This fight was more than mere practice—it’s a clash for superiority beneath the watchful gaze of fellow students.

Finally, Sena managed to corner Zeno. Sena increased the rhythm of his strikes and in a mad reaction, Zeno tried to break free, but Sena smelled a rat and threw a series of continuous swings of his sword. That left Zeno with no way out and he stumbled two or three steps backwards until both his legs crossed the line and entered the death zone. However, he did not manage to stop but lost his balance. The students cried out as Zeno was tumbling towards the edge of the cliff! Luckily the net did its job and saved him from falling into the ravine. Breathing heavily, he finally managed to get up.

Mr Fender made a soothing gesture with his hand. “Easy, boys! Even though there’s a lot at stake in the competition, don’t overdo it... And now, the bonus for the winner—we’ll have a little show! Pete, pick up your sword. Attack Sena... as best as you can. Sena may only defend himself. I bet you still won’t land a single hit.”

The blood drained from Pete’s face. He was up against the champion, Sena. Awkwardly he gripped his sword and tried to remember how the fighters had held it.

Sena grinned and said: “Hold on a second... I’m going into the death zone voluntarily! You can try to force me to the net.” With his back to the abyss, Sena waited for his opponent. He held the sword slightly raised.

Pete stepped forward. Both looked intensively at each other, with Sena waiting for Pete to make the first move—but nothing happened for fifteen seconds.

“Really cool how you hold the sword,” Sena called out. “Try not to stab yourself! Come on! Let’s see what you are made of.”

Suddenly Pete darted forward to deliver a swift strike to the side, but Sena was ready, parrying with a fluid motion that sent a ripple of energy through the wooden blades.

The first cheers were heard. They supported Pete, but only for a while. “Try again, Pete! Show us that California power!”

Pete tried not to pay any further attention to the shouts. Meanwhile, Sena seemed to know how hotheaded Pete would react when being insulted and that was what the samurai boy set out to do. When the two of them got close, Sena hissed without the others being able to hear: “You can’t do it, you worm! You’re just a lousy sissy! I’ll finish you off!”

With a sudden burst, Pete lunged forward with his sword arcing through the air like a comet, only to be met with a perfectly timed block. The boys began to jeer. Pete tried again,

but Sena's sword was already there. The swords clashed again and again. With each futile blow, the others roared louder, and with each attempt, Pete became angrier.

"You lousy wimp!" hissed Sena, grinning. "You sissy!"

Meanwhile, Pete resorted to swinging the sword but without rhythm or reason. Not a single swing came near Sena. On the contrary, Sena was getting more and more out of the death zone and forcing Pete in instead. With rage, Pete hardly noticed. If only he could catch that arrogant idiot! It shouldn't be that difficult, he thought. In the meantime, he was getting dangerously close to the death zone.

"Enough!" Mr Fender called out.

The shout had not yet died away when Sena had already lowered his sword and put on a sneer. However, Pete was still in the middle of a swing. He could have aborted, in fact, he had to, but the action still went through unnoticed... or so he hoped. It was like a car driver, after failing to beat the traffic lights, racing across the junction hoping that nobody saw the incident... but in Pete's case here, everyone there saw him following through on the final swing at the sneering Sena.

At the last moment, the samurai boy, being the best sword fighter of the lot, backed away a little and Pete almost grazed Sena's stomach. It seemed as if Sena had only been waiting for this because at the same moment, quick as a flash, he raised his sword and thrust at Pete's arm. The Second Investigator cried out, fell to the ground and writhed in pain.

"Try to do that again, you cheat!" shouted Sena, leaning over him.

11. 対立 Confrontations

“You fell into Sena’s trap, Pete.” Jupiter pressed the ice pack against Pete’s arm. Kisho was on his way to the kitchen to get more ice.

Although Pete knew Jupe was right, he defiantly asked: “Why?”

Jupiter groaned. “I can’t believe you always lose your nerve... Okay, based on what you just told me, let me reflect back to you how I see the situation.”

“Let’s hear it...”

“You told me so yourself—Sena provokes you, you get angrier and angrier, and it’s no problem for him to fend off your increasingly unimaginative blows.

“Fender stops the fight and Sena is clever enough to offer you his open side. You take advantage and follow through with your strike, even though the fight is over. Now it looks to everyone as if you’re trying to get one over on him. Even in this situation, he still managed to avoid your strike by backing up. However, your strike after the final bell gives him the moral right to attack back, and he takes advantage of that with great pleasure.”

“Mr Fender gave me a good dressing down, not just me but him too.”

“Sena can live with that. In hindsight, it’s your own fault. That was a lesson, Pete. He showed everyone who’s the boss around here.”

Pete squirmed. The best thing he could do was to change the subject quickly. “How was it with Bob? Is my MG still alive?”

The First Investigator grinned. “Which of these questions should I answer first?”

“The second one.”

“Yes, your MG is in great shape. Your tank was running low so I took the liberty to fill it up with diesel... Oh yes, on the way back, a tree came at me. When I swerved to avoid it, the bumper hit a large rock and got a bit banged up. Anyway, not to worry, I’m not hurt.”

“Good. You getting hurt is the least of my worries.”

Jupiter laughed. “Great! By the way, Bob has also had a painful encounter. Last night he followed Mr Sadamori out of the hotel. The man knocked him out for a moment with a well-aimed blow to the head.”

“The man was out last night?”

“Yes. I know what you’re thinking. Zeno was also out, but his venture could also have another reason.”

Pete frowned. “Mandy?”

“Yes. Bob had confirmed that Mandy is Zeno’s girlfriend—much to Bob’s disappointment, by the way.”

“Secretly?” Pete asked.

“Yes. I think having a girlfriend is considered quite embarrassing and soft among the samurai boys here. Maybe it’s even against the strict rules of training. It could distract too much from the discipline stuff.”

Pete grinned. “—Like you sometimes say girlfriends stop you from doing investigation work?”

“That’s half in jest, Pete! Don’t compare it to the strict school of the samurai. They’re really serious.”

“Yes. Given the way we have seen, I can well imagine.”

There was still some time before dinner. Jupiter decided that Pete should go to his room to ask Zeno about his girlfriend. Since the conversation with Kisho, he was convinced that Percy’s disappearance was connected to the samurai boys. At some point, their defensive wall was bound to crumble.

“I think it’s best if you talk to him alone. You are his roommate, however little he may like you. If I go with you, it will only put pressure on him. It’s worth a try.”

Reluctantly, the Second Investigator agreed. It meant venturing back into the lion’s den, but perhaps Zeno was on the prowl.

Pete was unlucky. Zeno was in the room. He was sitting at his desk and quickly hiding something when he heard the door opening. The very next moment, he turned around, glanced strangely at Pete and then at the latter’s forearm, which showed a bad bruise.

“Hi,” Pete said in a pointedly casual manner and stroked his aching spot.

“It’s dangerous to mess with Sena,” Zeno said.

Pete thought he had misheard. Was there a hint of compassion? Or was it a warning?

“Did you just hide your mobile phone from me?” asked Pete.

Zeno looked at him in surprise for a moment. “You weren’t asleep early this morning, were you?”

Pete shook his head.

“It’s none of your business,” said Zeno.

“It also doesn’t matter that you have a girlfriend?”

“No!” The answer came too sharply for Zeno to hide the fact that Pete had caught him.

“You’re absolutely right,” Pete said calmly. “It’s really none of my business.”

Zeno was silent. It was working inside him. He had suddenly lost his self-confidence.

Then he said: “Don’t tell anyone... please.”

From the tone of Zeno’s pleading, Pete knew that he now had the upper-hand and he was going to take full advantage of it.

“Why not?”

“I don’t want it.”

“Oh? Aren’t samurai trainees supposed to be distracted from their important concentration by something like girlfriends?”

“No. No girlfriends. It’s one of our rules. If we break it—” He faltered.

“Did Mr Fender put up such rules?”

Again it took Zeno a few moments before he answered. “Not exactly.”

“Why should I actually keep quiet?” Pete continued. “Zeno, I don’t care if you get into trouble. You can fight until you can’t crawl anymore for all I care—at least then I’ll have my peace.”

“I’m already in more than enough trouble,” Zeno said. “I promise you—I won’t hurt you anymore.”

The Second Investigator was now sure that he had Zeno on the ropes. Too bad Jupiter and Bob weren’t there. They would have known better what more to dig out of Zeno. Now he had to do it alone, but how? Poke around in the fog?

“You’re in trouble with Sena, aren’t you? Because of Percy? ... Percy was your friend, right?” said Pete.

Zeno remained silent.

“Percy had problems with Sena too, didn’t he?”

Zeno still remained silent.

“Sure, you want to be part of an elite and exclusive club where you are superior to everyone else, but what kind of tradition are you advocating? Intimidating and bullying other students? And who even forbids you to have a girlfriend?” Pete was on a roll and he was enjoying himself. “You know what? You are just a bunch of thugs! I do believe that your group of wannabe samurais have been brainwashed to deviate so much from an honourable tradition that you don’t even know what you are doing. When you leave school, how are you going to conduct yourself in society? You all are just ridiculous!”

Zeno jumped up and grabbed Pete by the T-shirt. His face was contorted. “We are not ridiculous!” he yelled at Pete. “We... we... are...”

Pete tore himself away. “Oh go look at yourself in the mirror, Zeno! You are pompous and ridiculous, and you’re just pretending that you don’t know it.”

The next moment, the Second Investigator turned around and left the stunned Zeno alone in the room. With a triumphant feeling, Pete headed to Jupiter’s room. He thought he had not done a bad job. Moreover, he was really proud of his exit.

The First Investigator was sitting on the edge of his bed and was talking to Kisho. “Come on, Pete, sit down,” Jupiter said. “Are you all right? New ice for the wound?”

Pete nodded. In the presence of Kisho, he decided not to say anything about his conversation with Zeno. Instead, he sat down and held out his arm to Jupiter.

Jupiter put an ice pack on the bruise. Although he was curious, he decided not to ask Pete until they were alone.

“We’re talking about Kisho’s former roommate who was expelled from school a few days ago,” Jupiter explained. “His name is René Walliser. He is from Switzerland, and he has gone back there now.”

“What did he do?”

“Nothing at all,” Kisho said, “but nobody believes him—except me. There was a series of events leading to him being judged unfairly.”

“Perhaps you can tell us about it,” Jupiter urged.

“Well, it was one afternoon last week when René attended a sports session with Mr Fender. Mr Fender happened to see him removing his watch and placing it in a locker.

“After that session, it was already evening, and René went for a jog just outside the school premises. It was something that he does almost every evening. However, on that day, at around the same time, Mr Crowe was attacked by a masked person. He took a real beating. None of us felt sorry for him.” Kisho grinned. “Oh well... eventually one of the samurai boys came to Crowe’s rescue and managed to chase off the attacker.”

“Did they have any idea who the attacker was?” asked Pete.

Kisho shook his head. “The attacker was wearing a stocking mask, but the suspicion immediately fell on René. Crowe had harassed him quite a bit earlier in the afternoon, but that was no proof. The thing is, in the scuffle, the attacker dropped his watch, and unfortunately, that belonged to René.

“By the time René got back from jogging, he discovered his watch stolen from his locker. He immediately went to the security office to report it with no knowledge of the attack on Crowe—which had already happened.

“With the discovery of the watch at the attack scene, Mr Fender had claimed that he saw René with the same watch before the sports session. Therefore, René was accused of reporting the watch lost after losing it in the attack on Crowe. Although there have been a few thefts here at school, no one believed his story—except me. René wouldn’t do something like that.”

“So the evidence was against him then,” Pete remarked.

“Yes,” Kisho agreed, “but that’s not all. When the security people investigated, another issue cropped up.”

“What was it?” asked Jupe.

“That night following the attack, a security officer conducted a search in this room and found the stocking mask under René’s mattress—this very mattress that you are now sitting on, Jupiter.”

“That’s strange,” Jupiter said, pinching his lower lip. “It’s clear to me that someone planted the mask here, because if René were the attacker—not that I’m saying he was—he would have just got rid of the mask somewhere, say by burying it in the forest. Why would he bring it back and hide it under this mattress?”

“Exactly!” Kisho agreed. “It was all a set-up.”

“So everything happened on that one day?” Pete asked.

“Yes,” Kisho said. “In any case, that was the end for René. The school decided to expel him.”

“Hmm...” Jupiter scratched the back of his neck. “So it was quite clear that René was framed... but why?”

“Perhaps someone wanted revenge on Crowe and framed René,” Kisho said. “You can’t trust anyone around here anymore.”

“Who actually saved Crowe?” asked Jupiter.

“That was Percy.”

“Aha! He then disappeared a short time later?”

“Yes, the day after that incident.”

“Strange...” Jupiter pinched his lower lip.

“You mean there is a connection?” asked Kisho.

Jupiter weighed his head. “One should consider all possibilities,” he said evasively, but he kept his thoughts to himself for now.

However, Pete still had a question. “By the way, what is actually in that forbidden tower?”

“You mean the small tower that is locked?”

Pete nodded. “I was near there yesterday and I had the impression that there was someone inside there.”

Kisho shook his head. “That can’t be. It is actually locked and closed off almost all the time—except once a year, on the school’s Open Day, when certain people are allowed in there. It’s kind of a sacred place. There are documents on display about the history of the school, and above all, the Golden Sword is kept there.”

“The Golden Sword?” Pete asked, and then he recalled that Mr Yukawa had talked about it. It was a precious samurai sword that was passed down from one school principal to the next.

“It is in a sealed glass display case. As far as I know, it is never taken out because it is very valuable. I have been allowed to see it once,” Kisho said with a grin. “On Open Day, the parents of the students are invited and taken to the small tower. It is for the school to show off the Golden Sword. Then there is also an exhibition fight with wooden swords outside by the ravine...”

“Hmm...” Jupe mumbled, deep in thought.

“By the way, I’m hungry. Shall we have dinner now?” Kisho suggested.

Jupe and Pete nodded.

The three boys left the building and walked to the dining hall. When they entered, most of the students were already there. Dinner was one of the few fixed activities in the otherwise relatively boring routine during the vacation.

The samurai boys had made themselves comfortable at the central table and were eating Japanese-style with chopsticks. Sena cast a cool glance at the trio who had arrived. Pete spotted Zeno chewing quietly.

Jupiter, Pete and Kisho each decided on a noodle dish and a pot of tea. They then sat down near the central table. During the meal, Pete looked over at the samurai boys from time to time. They talked quietly. Only Zeno remained silent.

Finally, Kisho got up to get a new pot of tea. He walked to the food counter, and Pete saw a samurai boy leave his table and go on his way as well. In his hand he also held a teapot. The boy quickly caught up with Kisho.

Then Pete suspected something strange so he kept an eye on the two students at the counter. Suddenly, Kisho stumbled and fell down. The samurai boy behind him fell over him as if by accident and spilled hot tea on Kisho's arm. It was clear to Pete that he had done it on purpose!

Kisho cried out in pain. Pete jumped up and rushed to help him.

12. 鍵 The Key

Kisho was lying on the ground with tears in his eyes. The hot water had turned the skin on his forearm red. The samurai boy stood back up and remained there grinning.

"You rascal," Pete yelled and shoved the boy, who then stumbled back, fell and knocked a table over, sending several plates and cups clattering to the floor.

Immediately two of the samurai boys were on Pete and held him back. "Take it easy, you hothead," one of them murmured.

Suddenly Mr Fender appeared. "What's going on here?" he asked, standing in front of Pete. "Why did you push Michael?"

"Because he hurt Kisho," Jupiter called out as he approached.

"That's not true!" It was Sena who had stepped forward. "I think Pete just has something against us. I felt it this afternoon at the sword practice. What happened here was Kisho tripped, and Michael fell over him. That's all it was."

"Is that right, Kisho?" asked Mr Fender.

Kisho was still sitting on the ground. They could tell he was scared, but then his eyes sought Jupiter's and something changed. "I didn't just trip," he said bravely. "Michael tripped me."

Mr Fender let his eyes wander. The other students had all joined them by now and were standing around the group.

"Anyway," said Mr Fender, "you all go back to your table... For you, Kisho, go to the school clinic immediately."

Under the gaze of the others, Juve and Pete escorted Kisho out.

When they were out of the dining hall, Kisho told Jupiter and Pete: "That wasn't all... Michael warned me about you."

"What do you mean 'warned'?" asked Pete.

"When I was lying on the ground, he whispered to me: 'Stay away from those two scumbags, otherwise, a lot more will happen to you!'"

"From those two... what?"

"He meant you two, Pete."

"Well?" asked Jupiter. "Will you do that? Stay away from us?"

Despite his pain, Kisho had to smile. "No. The days of listening to them are over, even if it can hurt sometimes."

Jupiter pulled open the door to the school clinic and pressed the bell for first aid.

After a few minutes, Mr Fender came in. "I'm on emergency duty today," he said.

Kisho sat on a chair and Mr Fender examined his arms. "Well, it doesn't look good," he muttered. "The tea must still have been quite hot."

Kisho nodded. "I know."

"I'm sure Michael didn't mean to do that. I spoke to him briefly."

Kisho said nothing. Finally, he received a wound ointment from Mr Fender.

Then Fender turned to Pete and Jupiter. "—And for you two, I have to say, for students who want to join us, you're acting pretty conspicuous! You don't keep to the rules, and you

get into fights—especially you, Pete—you seem to be a real hothead.”

Pete caught Jupiter’s look, which meant: ‘Think before you speak’.

“I’m sorry, Mr Fender,” he then said. “Things might not be quite as they seem.”

Kisho wanted to go back to his room. Jupiter went along to look after him and Pete went up one floor to his room. It was getting chilly on Shadow Stone in the evening, and he wanted to put on something warmer.

As Pete was approaching his room, he noticed a sliver of light seeping from under the door. “Bummer!” he thought to himself as he was hoping that Zeno was out. With a mix of trepidation, he quietly turned the knob and pushed the door open just enough to peek inside.

The Second Investigator was taken aback. There was Zeno, with his back to him, bending over suspiciously at Pete’s bed. Pete remained silent to see what his roommate was trying to do. Zeno then lifted Pete’s mattress a bit and slipped something underneath.

Satisfied, Zeno then stood up, turned around... and flinched when he saw Pete at the door. With eyes wide, he looked as if he had been caught in the act of a grand heist.

“Whoa, Zeno!” Pete exclaimed. “What did you just put under my mattress? More earthworms?”

“Uh...” Zeno was stunned. Something was on his mind.

Pete had caught Zeno red-handed. He closed the door to the room. “Let me see what you have hidden under my mattress.” He went over and lifted his mattress up a bit. To his surprise, the object was a key. There was a striking Japanese character inscribed on the bow of the key.

Astonished, Pete held the key up and looked at Zeno. “Why did you put this key under my mattress?”

Zeno remained silent. Something was wrong with him, Pete felt. The Second Investigator somehow found that Zeno was a bit different from the rest of the samurai boys. He hadn’t really participated in the baby shower. Even during the commotion when Kisho was attacked with the hot tea, Zeno had held back.

“Hey, Zeno! Speak up!” Pete barked. “If you don’t tell me what this is about, I’m going straight to Mr Hector to report you.”

“No! No! Don’t do that!” Zeno suddenly replied and turned pale. “Okay, okay... I can only say that I was instructed to put this key under your mattress.”

“By whom?”

“Uh... I can’t say...”

“Okay, I can figure out who,” Pete said calmly. “I’m sure, somehow Sena is involved.”

“No!” Zeno exclaimed. “Look... Pete... My hands are tied... but please don’t tell anyone that I put the key there. Just say that you found it, okay?”

“Oh really?” Pete remarked. “So what is this key for?”

“Uh...” Zeno fell silent again.

“I asked you a question. Speak up, you worm! Or are you just downright stupid?” For Pete, it was now redemption time, after all the abuse he had received from the samurai boys. “I’ll tell you what, Zeno, if I report you to Mr Hector, then you’ll get into real trouble with whoever asked you to do this, right? You want that to happen?”

“No, not that!” Zeno pleaded. “The key is for a door to a secret passageway.”

“Where is this door?”

Zeno hesitated before saying: “In the basement.”

“The basement in the administration building?”

“Yes.”

“Is it a metal door?”

“Yes.”

“Where does the passageway lead to?”

“Look... I can’t say too much. I am not a traitor. I was supposed to put the key under your mattress but I have no idea why. Now that you have it, what you do with the key is up to you.”

“Well, if you are not telling me anything more, I guess I have to find it out myself.”

“Uh... but not now.”

“Why?”

“In an hour’s time, the Samurai Club is holding an urgent meeting there.”

“—At the place where the passageway leads to?”

Zeno nodded. “It’s dangerous if they find you there... Look... you didn’t get the tip from me. Please, not a word! Not a word to anyone! If you get caught, please just say that you found the key under Percy’s bed. Is that clear?”

“We’ll see about that,” Pete said and grabbed his jumper from his wardrobe.

13. 塔の部屋で In the Tower Room

The Second Investigator opened the door and looked around to check if there was anyone there. Then he rushed down the stairs and burst into Jupiter's room.

The First Investigator was applying ointment to Kisho's arms. They seemed to be talking about the school principal.

"Will you come, Jupe?" asked Pete. "We need to check something."

Jupe nodded and looked at Kisho.

"Go on," said Kisho. "I can put the ointment on by myself."

"What happened?" Jupiter asked when they were out of the room.

"I... I've got a key," Pete said and briefly explained how he caught Zeno slipping the key under his mattress.

"Zeno said that I mustn't tell anyone. This is for getting into a secret passageway. Shall we check it out now?"

"Sure!" Jupiter said excitedly. "I love secret passageways!"

"Let's go!"

Another student entered the hallway and Pete waited until the coast was clear. Then they left the residential building and went into the administration building. Luckily there was no one at the reception counter. From there, they took the same route that Crowe had led them to the basement.

Moments later, they were in front of the metal door. Pete looked around to make sure that nobody was there. Then he pulled the key from his pocket, inserted it in the keyhole and turned it.

It worked! Pete breathed a sigh of relief. Maybe Zeno was to be trusted after all.

True enough, there was a passageway and it was pitch dark inside. Pete switched on his flashlight and went in. Jupiter followed curiously and pulled the door shut behind him. Pete locked the door back.

"Where does this secret passageway lead to?" he asked.

"I don't know. Zeno didn't say anything else. I hope it's not a trap, but somehow I've come to trust him since we talked about his girlfriend. I don't think he approves of everything the samurai boys do. We still have fifty minutes to go."

"—And then what?"

"The Samurai Club is holding a meeting at the place where this passageway leads to... and if they catch us in their sanctuary, there should be more than bruises."

"So let's hurry!" Jupe urged.

The passageway was narrow and lined with bricks on the sides and ceiling. It ran straight ahead for a few metres and then went slightly upwards. There was no way to hide here.

Cautiously they walked on. The further they went, the more eerie it became for Pete. The air smelled musty. It was completely silent. He only heard their footsteps and their breathing. What if they were suddenly surprised here from the front and from behind? He wanted to finally get to the end and see daylight again. Pete walked faster and faster.

After a few minutes, the passageway suddenly ended at a staircase.

Jupiter checked his watch. "With a safety buffer, we still have thirty-five minutes."

The Second Investigator shone the light up the steps and the beam caught a door. "I hope that door is not locked," he said.

"Locked doors are usually not a problem for you," Jupe remarked.

"Not if my lock pick set is in my other jeans."

"Well, let's have a look." Jupiter pushed past Pete, climbed the steps and carefully turned the door handle. "Locked."

"Wait." Pete pulled out the key from Zeno. It was worth a try. Jupiter took it and tried it out. It fitted here too!

Cautiously, Jupiter opened the door. Only a little light fell into the room through the small, high-set windows, as it was already dusk outside. Jupiter saw that the room was enclosed by a round wall.

"We're in the forbidden tower!" he murmured in surprise. "Pete, you were outside here last night, weren't you, wondering how the people got in and out of here. Now it's clear!"

The two of them entered, and Pete shone his flashlight around the room. On the floor were Japanese mats on which the samurai boys presumably sat when they met here. Along the side were five old ornate wooden crates that could probably also serve as benches.

On one wall was a large poster. It was an old Japanese drawing depicting an execution. Pete could hardly tear himself away from the horrific sight—the death row inmate was kneeling on a mat while the executioner was already swinging his sword behind him.

At the far end of the room was a screen. Jupiter looked to see what was behind it.

"It's a second door," he said in surprise. "You can also get in here from this door, but where is the Golden Sword Kisho told us about?"

Between the screen and the second door, there was a square wooden platform with sides of about a metre and a height of about 30 centimetres. On the platform was a cushion like those used for meditation.

Pete paced around the room, searching the floor and the wall. Suddenly something crunched under his feet. Startled, he stopped and pointed the flashlight downwards. It was broken glass.

"Up there!" cried Jupiter. "Shine the light upwards."

Pete lifted his flashlight. There was an elongated glass case almost three metres high above the floor, directly under an open, embrasure-like window. In it was placed the Golden Sword—at least that was what it said on a sign below the case, only that the case was now smashed and nothing was inside!

"It's gone!" Pete snapped. "The sword is gone! Possibly stolen."

"Exactly," Jupiter said, taking the flashlight from Pete's hand. "—And I don't like it at all."

Attentively, Jupiter shone the light on everything. "I believe I now know why Zeno put that key under your mattress—it is to frame you for stealing the Golden Sword."

"The time!" cried Pete. "We need fifteen minutes to get back. If we don't want to be caught in here, we have to get out now!"

"We'll try the second door," Jupe suggested. "Maybe your key will fit that door as well."

Pete hurried to try it out. Nope, it did not fit, and Pete did not have his lock pick set with him. What a bummer!

"Let's go back the same way then," Jupe decided.

They left the tower room and locked the door. Then they made their way back through the narrow passageway. Although they hurried, Pete was getting more and more nervous. They had stayed in the tower room longer than planned.

Almost every minute, Pete glanced at his watch. “Ten more minutes,” he said. “Mind you, we don’t have a buffer left.”

At the same moment, Jupiter grabbed Pete’s arm. “Did you hear that? Voices! Someone’s coming! Shoes off!”

“Shoes off?”

“So they don’t hear us running.”

14. 師匠の訓示 The Master's Instructions

They kicked off their shoes, picked them up, and turned around. In socks, they ran back down the passageway. The ground was uneven, but they ignored the pain in their feet. What they had to expect from the samurai boys would be worse. If anything happened, there would be no witnesses.

Precious seconds passed because Pete couldn't unlock the door with his trembling fingers. Finally Jupe intervened and they stormed back into the tower room. Jupiter locked the door behind him.

"Better find somewhere to hide." Jupiter looked around. Apart from the wooden crates, there was no place to hide.

"Into the wooden crates then," Jupiter said and went to the nearest one. Fortunately for them, the lid could be lifted.

"It's full!" cried Jupiter in horror. "Candlesticks, candles."

The next one contained more mats. The third, at last, was empty and just big enough for one person to fit in crouching down.

"Go on, get in," Jupiter urged.

The Second Investigator hesitated. "What if they find us?"

"They would smash us to bits, so just keep quiet."

Pete didn't need to be told twice. He climbed in and Jupiter flipped the lid shut. Then they heard the key being turned in the lock of the first door. In one leap, the First Investigator was at the next crate and flipped it open. He exhaled with relief—it was empty. He quickly got in. At the same moment as the door opened, Jupiter closed the lid above him.

Several people entered the room. Then the lights were turned on. Almost at the same moment, excited shouts rang out: "Hey, look!"

"The sword!"

"It's gone!"

"Who did that?"

"Calm down, calm down." That was Sena. "Sit down first and I'll explain to you."

The rest spoke in hushed voices. The mats on the floor were pushed back and forth. Instinctively, Pete and Jupe hoped that no one had the idea of moving the crates or opening them.

Suddenly they heard Sena's voice: "Get the candles!"

The next moment, footsteps approached Pete's crate. The Second Investigator saw a leg right in front of the crate. The person bent down and put his hands on the lid. Pete closed his eyes. It was over!

"Hey, not that crate," someone called out. It was Zeno's voice. "The candles are in the first one."

The person then went to the first crate and rummaged around in it. Very slowly, Pete exhaled. That had gone well just in time! Then he realized it was thanks to Zeno!

A short time later, the electrical lamps were turned off and the flickering candlelight filtered through the narrow cracks of the crates.

Jupiter could not see anything as the cracks in his crate were too narrow for that, but Pete was lying in such a way that he caught a glimpse of the scene through a gap between the boards.

The samurai boys sat on the mats, staring at the broken glass case in bewilderment. Only Sena remained standing.

“Okay, listen up,” Sena said. “I have already told some of you why we are called here for an urgent meeting. As you can clearly see, the Golden Sword has been stolen. I was informed by the samurai master a few hours ago. It was discovered this morning, and we are now here because the master is coming to address us. He has an important task for all of us, and that is to recover the sword.”

The boys remained seated at their mats and whispered quietly. Nothing happened for a few moments. Pete’s legs began to ache. The urge to stretch them grew, but that was out of the question. He wondered how Jupe was doing. He was smaller than Pete, but also fuller. It was lucky that he had fit into the crate at all!

Suddenly Pete heard the second door being unlocked.

“Quiet! The master is here,” Sena announced. The whispering of the boys died away.

Moments later, Pete could sense someone entering the room. The Second Investigator tried to get a better view, but it was almost impossible. At least he saw that another candle was lit behind the screen.

A shadow appeared on the screen. It had to be an adult, probably in a samurai warrior costume judging by the outline. He remained behind the screen before sitting down on the raised cushion.

After a few moments, the man mumbled a few Japanese words. He had a deep voice that sounded somewhat distorted as he was probably wearing a warrior mask. The boys answered in chorus in Japanese.

Then the man switched to English: “Samurai! You have seen it! Our sword has been stolen! It’s not only valuable, but it’s also a symbol of the school’s strength! And it is a samurai relic.” The speaker paused, and Pete and Jupiter heard shouts of approval from the samurai boys.

“The theft is a bad culmination of a long chain of negligence, of aberrations, of the disintegration of our elite culture.”

There were more shouts of approval. Sena could be heard among them: “We have to put an end to this! Shadow Stone is going soft.”

“Well said!” The man behind the screen commended. “People have become weak and soft. Shadow Stone has become weak. We must act with a firmer hand. We are all that hand!

“Do not let yourselves be divided! Who, if not we, the samurai, have to restore order? We are like the *shishis*—the warriors who bravely stood against the sick order of the new Japan. Be wise like the *shishis*! Be brave like the *shishis*. Fight for your school! Find the sword, and convict the perpetrators!”

A chorus of loud “*Hai!*” filled the room.

“I’m going back to Danville now,” the samurai master said, “but I will be back soon. Go your way, samurai! Go the way of the warriors!”

Then the master reverted back into Japanese. A short while later, he stood up. Pete watched as the shadow disappeared from the screen and the man left the room through the second door.

After a brief moment of absorbed silence, Sena took the floor. “Did you hear what the master said? We are the *shishis* of Shadow Stone! Fight for our cause... and those who dissent will suffer.”

“—Like the two new guys,” someone shouted. “We have to watch them!”

“Exactly!” exclaimed Sena. “Those two are causing unrest here—like a virus! I wouldn’t be surprised if they had something to do with the sword! We have to be careful! That Jupiter guy gives me the creeps!”

“Meanwhile, we have to follow the master’s instructions. I will draw out a plan and schedule for each one of you. We have to go look for the sword and some of us have to start tonight. Let’s go now. I will call you soon to give you your assignment.”

The assembly was concluded, and whispering, the samurai boys left the room. Sena held Zeno back for a moment. “What about the key?” he asked.

“Uh... done,” Zeno replied.

Then the door was shut from the outside, and Pete and Jupiter heard it being locked.

Whew! Pete exhaled. That had gone well just in time, but from what he had heard, the worst was yet to come.

“Jupe?”

“Yes?”

“Are you still there?”

“Yes, but I feel like a burger squeezed between the paws of Uncle Titus!”

“Shall we come out?”

“Yes... I think the coast is clear.”

It was not so easy to get out of the crates. Pete’s legs had fallen asleep and the somewhat portly Jupiter had even more problems.

Finally, they stood in the room and stretched their limbs. “Who do you think that strange samurai master was?” asked Pete. “He seems to live in Danville. It may be the man staying with Bob at the hotel.”

Jupiter nodded. “Anyway, we have to inform Bob. Maybe he can get something out of it. Above all, we have to find the sword, otherwise they’ll pin the theft on us.”

“Did you hear Sena asking Zeno about the key?”

“Of course,” Jupe said. “Now, I’m quite sure Sena wanted to plant that key onto you. Anyway, let’s get out of here!”

Pete didn’t let himself be told twice. Cautiously, they made their way back.

When they reached the other end of the passageway, Pete carefully unlocked the door and glanced through the gap. The coast seemed clear so they walked through the basement and up the staircase.

When Jupiter and Pete ran out of the administration building, they saw Sena and Zeno standing a little further ahead. Apparently they were having a heated exchange of words.

At the sight of Jupiter and Pete, they fell silent in mid-sentence. The surprise was clearly written on Sena’s face. “What were you doing in there?”

“We were at the phone booths,” Jupe replied without hesitation.

“Don’t lie!” Sena barked. “I didn’t see anyone at the phone booths.”

“Then go get your eyes checked,” Jupe replied, grinning challengingly at Sena. “Come on, Pete. Let’s go. No time to waste talking to these two.”

Sena wanted to say something back, but Jupiter had already grabbed Pete by the arm and pulled him on. When they reached the residential building, Jupe pushed Pete along. “We’re not going inside yet. Let’s hide around those bushes there and watch what the two of them are going to do.”

A while later, Sena and Zeno reached the entrance to the residential building and stopped. They heard Sena talking aggressively to Zeno, but they understood nothing, as they were speaking in Japanese.

Pete bent a branch to one side, and there against the moonlight they saw the outline of the two—Sena stood in front of Zeno. Zeno's face was not visible in the darkness, but Pete sensed that he was afraid. Finally, Sena concluded his monologue.

"Are you sure you understand?" he said, now in English. "I have to go speak with Mr Fender, but I will get back to you soon on your task. It's your last chance, Zeno! Show which side you're on."

Zeno nodded. Without another word, Sena turned and went into the building. Zeno paused for another moment. It seemed as if he was trembling. Very slowly, Pete pushed the branch back again. They waited for Zeno to go back into the building—but he didn't. He stood there, seemingly uncertain what to do... Moments later, he walked away from the building.

"One of us must contact Bob," Jupiter said. "He may have some new information. Meanwhile, we need to keep an eye on Zeno and see what he's going to do next."

"I'll go after Zeno," Pete said. "You wouldn't agree the other way round after all, but please don't wreck my car when you go to Bob's..."

"It's too late for that. We have to be in our rooms soon. I can call Bob from the phone booth," Jupiter replied. "We've agreed on a code. If there's something important to tell, we'll replace the names with friends from Rocky Beach and disguise everything a bit. When I've spoken to him, I'll come back here to look for you."

"Okay, Jupe."

They parted. In the darkness, Pete followed Zeno as he went towards the sports hall and then behind it. The Second Investigator had to take a wide path to go round several bushes so as not to be seen by his roommate. Finally, he saw him huddled behind the sports hall, talking on his mobile phone.

Pete wondered if he should approach him to eavesdrop on what he was saying. The open terrain here didn't really allow that, but since Zeno had his back turned, Pete slowly ventured forward. When he was within earshot, Zeno suddenly pocketed his mobile phone.

Pete managed to hide back behind a bush just as Zeno made his way back the way he came. The Second Investigator again followed his roommate.

When Pete was sure that Zeno had gone back into the residential building, he turned towards the administration building where the telephone booths were, but after a few metres, Jupiter came towards him.

"So?" asked Pete.

"Bob has switched off his mobile phone," Jupiter said. "I hope that doesn't mean anything bad."

Pete reported what Zeno had been doing and the two of them hid behind a bush to continue to discuss. Basically, they had mixed feelings. They sensed something in the air. Through their presence on Shadow Stone and their investigations, they had stirred something up. This would not go well for much longer.

Finally, Jupe decided to return to their rooms just in time to avoid breaking curfew.

15. 嫌疑 Under Suspicion

There was no other way. Bob had to turn off his mobile phone as he wanted to seize the opportunity to check Mr Sadamori's room. In case he was surprised and had to hide, the phone could betray him easily.

Sadamori had just left the hotel. Quietly, Bob crept to the reception counter. From the small office behind it came the distorted noise of a crowd of spectators—Mandy's uncle was watching a sports broadcast.

Bob reached across the counter. Mandy had told him where the master key was hanging. He grabbed the key, went back up to the first floor, and carefully unlocked the door to Sadamori's room. It smelled strongly of his perfume. Bob went in and locked the door behind him. He wasn't sure what to look for, so he just started somewhere.

The suitcase was unpacked. In the wardrobe were regular shirts, jackets and trousers—nothing suspicious. The other half of the wardrobe was empty. On the desk were documents from the hotel and a sheet of paper. Bob held the paper up to the light from the window, but there was nothing, not even the imprint of a pen.

There was a briefcase leaning against the bedside table that caught Bob's attention. He knelt down and found several blank sheets of paper. In the side pocket was a small digital camera. Just as he took it out, Bob heard footsteps in the hallway. He quickly stood up and ran to hide in the empty half of the wardrobe.

The footsteps outside passed and Bob heard another door being unlocked. That could either be a new guest or just Mandy's uncle. Anyway, he relaxed, but stayed in the wardrobe and switched on the camera. Images appeared on the display that Bob couldn't identify. He continued to scroll through the photos.

Suddenly he was startled. Several photos were of him talking to Mandy, taken through the shop window. The next photo was that of a sword with a golden handle. Following that was what must have been a hundred shots of the sword from all sides, the hilt, the blade—all the details. It lay on a dark background on which a line of distance markings had been drawn.

Bob was so engrossed in the photos that he didn't hear anything outside in the hallway—until a key was turned in the lock.

Carefully looking to avoid meeting Crowe, Jupe and Pete scurried into the residential building.

When they reached the hallway where Jupiter's room was, they saw that the door to his room was wide open. The room was brightly lit and several people were inside. Clearly audible was the voice of Mr Fender: "Break it down, Crowe!"

Pete and Jupiter looked at each other, picked up their pace and stormed into the room. Apart from Mr Fender and Crowe, Sena was also there... Standing a short distance away, was Kisho, looking very pale.

"There they are, the two of them!" Mr Fender called out.

At that moment, the door to Jupiter's wardrobe burst open with a loud crash. Crowe let out a satisfied laugh. He dropped the crowbar and set about searching the individual compartments.

"What are you doing?" Jupiter exclaimed indignantly. He also noticed that his mattress was lifted up.

"There is a strong suspicion that you two are involved in a theft," Fender said. "You've seemed very strange to me all along."

"—And what, pray tell, are we supposed to have stolen?" the First Investigator asked.

"A sword—the Golden Sword! Don't pretend like you don't know. Fortunately, my samurai boys are very vigilant." He looked at Sena.

Sena nodded. "Zeno and I saw the two of them lurking around the administration building."

Mr Fender glanced at the wardrobe. "Well, what is it, Crowe?"

"Nothing!" Crowe had finished his inspection and Jupiter's clothes were now a tangled heap on the floor. "We have to go search Pete's room now."

"In a minute, Crowe." Mr Fender turned to Pete. "Do you admit you stole the sword?"

"Sena may have seen us coming out of the administration building," Jupe said, "but what has that got to do with stealing a sword?"

"Why don't you examine their clothes?" Sena said coolly.

Mr Fender nodded. "Mr Crowe, please do that."

Crowe set to work. It wasn't long before he had unearthed the key to the secret passageway from Pete. "Here you go, Mr Fender," he said, smiling wryly.

The teacher glanced at the key. The inscribed Japanese character made it easy to identify. "I'm very sure this is a key to the Golden Sword room. I guess the reason you two came to this school was to steal the sword. So now... where did you hide it?"

"None of this is true!" cried Pete indignantly.

"Okay, first things first," Mr Fender said. "Where did you get this key from?"

"Zeno put the key under my mattress." At the same moment Pete almost bit his tongue. It had just slipped out of his mouth. He shouldn't have said it.

"That's ridiculous," Sena said quietly. "Zeno would never do such a thing. The fact that they have managed to get the key clearly suggests that they stole the sword."

"Exactly." Mr Fender was visibly disgusted. "Tomorrow we'll get the police. They'll get the truth out of you."

"Wonderful! I welcome that," Jupiter said. "I have many things to tell them. They should go after Sena first and foremost."

Mr Fender was speechless for a moment. "Don't get smart with me, Jupiter," he then thundered. "I would vouch for Sena! Without him you'd be long gone! We'll hand you two over to the police to deal with. This is the end of your stint here. Good riddance, you'll be gone from Shadow Stone tomorrow."

Jupiter took a breath. "Before that, I'd like to speak to Mr Yukawa. After all, it was he who got us to this school."

"It's just like him to bring rogues like you here." Mr Fender smiled thinly. "You can talk to him tomorrow, Jupiter. It's just too bad for you that as of tonight he's no longer the principal of this school. The Board of Trustees has removed him from the position. He won't be able to help you. He'll come back to Shadow Stone tomorrow as an ordinary teacher."

"Mr Fender," Sena spoke up. "We still have to find the sword. The police are unlikely to help us do that."

"You're right, Sena," Mr Fender said.

“So shall we now go to Pete’s room?” Crowe eagerly suggested.

Mr Fender led the group to Pete’s room to take a closer look at everything there as well. Zeno was already lying in bed. When he saw what was going on, he got up and watched wordlessly as Pete’s private belongings were thoroughly searched.

“Zeno, did you see the two of them coming out of the administration building a while ago?” Mr Fender asked Zeno.

The Second Investigator noticed Sena giving Zeno a sharp look. Zeno nodded.

Meanwhile, Crowe had finished with the wardrobe. He overturned the mattress and even moved Pete’s bed to the side, but the sword was not there.

“We’ll find it,” growled Fender. “From now on you two are under detention until you decide to speak.”

“So come along!” commanded Crowe. “‘Shadow Stone Jail’ is looking forward to seeing you.”

“Can I change my jeans first?” asked Pete. “These stink.”

Mr Fender wrinkled his nose. “Fine by me,” he said. “Just do it quickly before I lose my patience.”

The Second Investigator pulled another pair of jeans out of the pile of clothes and changed. Mr Fender and Sena didn’t take their eyes off him.

As soon as he had finished, he and Jupiter were about to be led away when Sena spoke up: “Hold on a minute... The two of them drove up here. We should also search their car.”

“You’re right again, Sena,” Mr Fender praised. “Get your car keys and lead us to your car.”

Mr Fender, Crowe and Sena led the two investigators out of the building into the car park. Pete then unlocked his car and Mr Crowe and Sena proceeded to search it.

“Just don’t damage my car with your paws,” Pete called out.

“Don’t be cheeky with us,” Mr Fender said. “The Golden Sword is worth much more than your car.”

Five minutes later, the search ended with no result.

“Fine,” Mr Fender said. “Off you go to the detention room. Tomorrow, we will let you out when the police are here.”

Shadow Stone Jail was in the basement of the administration building. It was next to Crowe’s storeroom with the samurai gear.

Crowe pushed the two investigators inside. The detention room was a small, unadorned room with an adjoining toilet. There were three simple wooden beds, and the walls were decorated with all kinds of slogans—indications that some students had already served their sentences here.

The caretaker then tossed two old blankets to them. “Have a good night’s rest,” he said, followed by an evil laugh. Then he locked the door from the outside.

Disgruntled, Jupiter dropped onto one of the beds. “I’m afraid we’re stuck,” he said. “I didn’t think they would be so quick to pin the theft of the Golden Sword on us... By the way, Pete, why did you...” Suddenly his face brightened.

“—Change my jeans?” Pete finished the question and grinned.

Jupiter already knew the answer. “Your favourite set of tools?”

Pete nodded. “In retrospect, it was really good that I didn’t have it with me earlier—otherwise Crowe would have taken it from me during the search.”

“—And in your wardrobe, Crowe only looked for the sword,” said Jupiter. “He didn’t pay any attention to the little things. Pete, that was really amazing.”

“Really amazing? I take that as a compliment,” Pete said. “I hope it works out.”

The Second Investigator waited for a while until he thought Crowe had gone away, and then he pulled his lock pick set out of a narrow inside pocket of his jeans. Carefully, he tampered with the lock. It held out against Pete for a whole two minutes. Then it clicked. Pete proudly opened the door and looked outside.

“No Crowe around! The coast is clear! So what do we do now?”

“Let’s get out of here first,” said Jupiter.

16. 黄金の太刀 The Golden Sword

It was an exhausting night. Jupiter and Pete could not go back to their rooms as they were supposed to be in detention. One option was to drive off and leave the school, but that would not solve anything. The other option was to hide just outside the residential building to keep an eye on the samurai boys. Jupiter and Pete could only do that before Crowe discovered them missing—after which they would have to come up with another plan.

In the moonlight, the residential building was easy to make out, but nothing was happening. Instead, the two investigators got to hear the sounds of the night and also some animals, especially mosquitoes.

“If Sena gets hold of the sword, he would somehow plant it as evidence on one of us,” Jupiter said, “so we take turns staying awake here to keep watch.”

They had taken the old blankets from the detention room. Pete wrapped himself in them first, while Jupiter took over the observation.

Pete was exhausted, and almost immediately, he fell asleep. Meanwhile, the First Investigator pulled himself together to manage his impatience to contact Bob. Besides, he had to make sure that Crowe didn’t surprise them on one of his nightly forays.

Sadamori had come into his room. Bob was stuck. Fortunately, he was well hidden in the empty part of the wardrobe, but that wasn’t secure. Sadamori could just open his wardrobe... or he could discover his camera missing and become suspicious.

Bob heard the man sit down on the bed and switch on the television. The dialogue from an entertainment programme went on for a while and nothing had happened so Bob decided to continue looking at the photos in the camera.

There were a lot more shots of the sword. In two photos, the sword was lying on a scale. Then came a few photos that were not of the sword. They were taken from what looked like the outside of a simple wooden cabin. Outside was night, and inside was a light. A boy was sitting there writing something at a table. Bob zoomed in on him. Even though the shot was grainy and a little out of focus, he seemed to recognize the boy.

In the meantime, dawn had come. Jupiter and Pete had taken turns keeping watch. Now it was Pete’s turn again. Nothing had happened except that hundreds of mosquitoes had attacked him. Jupiter, strangely enough, had hardly any bites. Pete scratched his neck profusely and was just wondering what it meant when Jupiter rolled over to him and said: “I have to check with Bob or else it won’t give me a moment’s peace.”

“If you go to the phone booths now, Crowe will see you,” Pete said.

“I’m not going to call Bob. I’m going to Danville to find him.”

“How are you going to go there?”

“In your MG.”

Pete groaned and tossed his car keys to Juve. “Hurry up. There are so many samurai boys around and I will have a hard time following them.”

“Okay.” Jupiter unwrapped himself from the blankets and scrambled to his feet. “Don’t take any chances, Pete. I’ll be back.”

“Look out for the trees and rocks.”

“Not to worry. This time, I’ll drive along the middle of the road.” With that, the First Investigator hurried off.

Pete looked at the residential building, as he had done a thousand times in the past hours. The building just stood there in silence, only now it was more visible in the dawn.

For a few minutes, nothing happened. When five minutes had passed, Pete started to get nervous. He looked at his watch at ever shorter intervals. Then he heard the sound of a door closing. He almost didn’t notice—Zeno had come out of the building!

Pete couldn’t lose sight of him. The Second Investigator stood up and stretched his limbs quickly. Then he scurried behind the bushes to keep pace with his roommate.

Zeno ran along the wall. After a short while he had arrived at the bottom of the forbidden tower. Pete held back a little and watched him climb the steps. When Zeno reached the rooftop, he disappeared from Pete’s view.

The Second Investigator waited a moment, then he also crept up the stairs. Carefully he took the last steps and peered into the rooftop. There was no one there!

Pete could hardly believe it. Where was Zeno? Stooping down, he hurried to the parapet and peered over the edge. Zeno was walking along a path that continued under the trees of the adjacent forest. Pete knew where it ended. He had walked along there before.

Then Pete discovered some knots tied on the parapet railing. It was a rope ladder hanging down the outside of the wall! So Zeno doesn’t want to be discovered, thought Pete, and he looked down again. Now the boy had disappeared into the forest.

Pete did not think twice. He pulled himself over the parapet and climbed down the rope ladder. When he reached the bottom, he hurried to give chase. Climbing down had cost him valuable time.

Pete sprinted off and quickly reached the edge of the forest. There he slowed down and crept along a path for a while. After a few minutes, the path curved and led directly to the plateau that lay above the ravine. This was where the sword practice was held yesterday.

Pete stopped before the bend and listened. He only heard the sounds of the birds and the rustling of the leaves. The murmur of the stream deep down in the ravine was also already sounding through to him.

Cautiously, he walked on. Now only a free-standing rock blocked his view. He slowly circled it to see what was happening on the plateau. Zeno was crouching there—at the metal box for storing the safety net.

Zeno took out the net and put it aside. Then he put on a glove and reached into the box again. This time, he took out something long and shiny.

Pete caught his breath—it was the Golden Sword! Zeno held it in his hand and turned it in the first rays of the sun. The blade seemed to glow.

For a moment, Pete was so distracted that he almost missed a crackling sound. The direction it came from was diagonally ahead, not far from him. Pete saw a brief movement behind one of the smaller trees. It was not an animal as it was too cautious and too stealthy for that. No doubt, there was someone else. Obviously the other person was careful not to make a noise, but that could not be entirely avoided in the forest.

Pete thought in a flash. He was alone. No one knew he was here. He had to be careful. Who was that? He wouldn’t stand a chance against someone like Sena. There were no witnesses except Zeno, who was a hard person to judge. Apparently Sena had him under

control again. If Sena found Pete and pushed him into the ravine, it would look like an accident.

Hastily, Pete left his position and retreated behind a rocky outcrop to wait and see what happened. Almost without realizing it, he grabbed a branch leaning against the rock.

Shortly afterwards, the other person had reached the plateau. Pete heard it from the firm footsteps on the rocky ground. Zeno cried out in surprise. Then there was a brief scuffle, followed by complete silence.

Pete huddled against the rock in fear. He held his breath and cautiously pushed forward a little to see what was happening.

“Traitor!” a voice called out.

Immediately Pete recognized it. The sun’s rays were falling through the branches now, as if all was calm and peaceful, but his heart was pounding all the way to his ears. For him, it was the darkest place in the world.

“Traitors must die!” Slowly the words came, very coldly. Pete closed his eyes, trying to gain control of himself.

“—And you are a traitor!”

Pete knew that he had to do something, but what? Then he heard something else—a very fine, high-pitched sound. It was the sword—a short swing that cut the air. This could only lead to one thing—death!

The blood froze in his veins. Why had they accepted this assignment? Suddenly, images flashed through his mind—Jupiter, Bob and him—they were just at the salvage yard less than a week ago.

The last hours flashed before him as if in fast motion, but it was a movie that could not be changed. He had to act now. He had to save Zeno, who was now supposed to die, because Pete had betrayed him when he accidentally revealed that Zeno had hidden the key under his mattress. Why hadn’t he been able to keep his mouth shut then?

Pete gripped the branch tighter. Silently, he crept around the rock until he got a clearer view of the scene. Sena had his back to him. In his hand was the Golden Sword. Sena must have surprised Zeno and taken it from him. Zeno was at the edge of the cliff, on his knees, and pure fear was seen in his eyes. He must have noticed Pete but had the presence of mind not to do anything to alert Sena.

“You were given the simple task of putting the key under the mattress and you just could not do it without being discovered.”

Zeno remained silent.

“You’re a traitor!” Sena barked. “Traitors must die... Jump!”

Zeno shook his head. “You can’t do this to me!”

“I am a descendant of the samurai. The samurai has a licence to kill.”

“That was hundreds of years ago!”

“When you’re down, it doesn’t matter. It would be an accident—nothing but an accident.”

“You can’t do this to me, Sena!” repeated Zeno.

“Why not?” asked Sena calmly. “You’re trapped—just like Percy was. Now jump!” He took a step towards Zeno.

“Sena!” It was Pete who called out.

The samurai boy turned around in a flash. Their gazes locked with an intensity that crackled in the air.

It was game on. On one side, standing resolute, was Sena Hattori, Shadow Stone’s best sword-fighting student. In his grasp was the Golden Sword—a deadly weapon forged from

the finest Japanese steel. On the other side was Pete Crenshaw, the Second Investigator, armed with a humble tree branch.

Pete knew this was for real, and not a practice match. All of a sudden, he didn't know what to do next.

With one leap, Sena was upon him. Like a man possessed, Sena delivered the first blow, but Pete managed to deflect it. The second blow hit the branch so hard that it broke into two pieces and Pete was left with only a stump in his hand.

Pete's heart almost stopped. Now he was at Sena's mercy. The samurai boy's eyes were triumphant. The third blow scraped Pete's arm and blood appeared. The Second Investigator was frozen with shock.

Sena was about to take another swing, but out of the blue, Zeno appeared behind him. In one swift motion, Zeno unleashed a ferocious *mawashi geri*—the roundhouse kick—to the side of Sena's body. The kick landed hard and stunned Sena. He stumbled, and the Golden Sword slipped out of his hand as he gasped in shock. Zeno kicked the weapon away, and it skidded across the rocky ground towards the abyss.

It happened very quickly—Sena cursed, rushed after the sword, stumbled, lost his balance, and slid headlong over the edge.

In an instant, both the sword and Sena were gone from the boys' sight.

17. パーシーはどうした？ What Happened to Percy?

For a moment, they were both frozen.

Then Zeno started to move. “Sena!”

Pete ran forward as well. Full of fear of the sight that awaited them, they both bent over the precipice... but it wasn't what they had thought.

Sena's right hand clutched a young tree that had nestled on a ledge near him. The young trunk bent downwards under the boy's weight. At any moment, it could give way. Further, about ten metres down, the Golden Sword was stuck in a bush that was growing out of the cliff side, swaying lightly, as if waiting for its master. Luckily it did not drop all the way down to the ravine.

Sena's eyes widened in fear as the tree groaned under his movements. A thought flashed through Pete's mind—if they just turned around and left now, they would be rid of Sena forever... but in an instant, that idea was gone. He was not like that, else he would be like Sena. Both he and Zeno couldn't bring themselves to do it.

Almost simultaneously, the two of them reached out a hand to grab Sena. They caught his wrists. Together they pulled him up bit by bit. When Sena managed to get a foothold, it helped.

A few moments later, Sena was back on the plateau, crouched down and breathing heavily. Parts of his clothes were torn. Apart from a few scrapes, he seemed unhurt but was in a daze. He looked at Pete and Zeno, muttered something unintelligible, and suddenly ran off into the forest.

Pete and Zeno looked at him go.

“Thank you for saving me,” Zeno said.

“If he had wanted to, he would have taken both of us out with that sword,” Pete said as he took off his jumper and his T-shirt and used his T-shirt to wipe the blood off. “What's between you and Sena?”

“He told me this morning that if I am loyal to the tradition, I have to go look for the sword in that metal box. In reality, it was a trap. I should have guessed that. You have to stand by Sena and the samurai one hundred percent, otherwise it gets serious—especially now, when such strange things are happening.”

“I'm sorry that I put you in this dangerous situation, Zeno. I couldn't keep my mouth shut when Crowe found the key on me. I blurted out that I saw you putting it under my mattress. Sena was there and heard it. I'm sorry about that.”

“That's all right.”

“What happened to Percy? Is he dead?”

Zeno shook his head. “Sena intimidated Percy so much that he ran off and hid. Sena somehow suspects that I know that. He's distrusted me ever since. I just don't know what happened between the two of them.”

Zeno helped Pete tie his T-shirt around his wound. It was not very deep and hardly hurt. Then he pulled his jumper over it. “How do I get from here to Danville?”

“Why do you want to go there?” asked Zeno.

"I want to meet Jupe. He's there with Bob."

"So Bob is your friend staying in Danville," Zeno said.

The Second Investigator nodded. "You know about him through Mandy?"

"Yes..." Zeno said. "We'll go to Danville together. I don't want to go back to the school now. Besides, I want to show you something."

Zeno led Pete across the forest until they reached a wider path that ran above the ravine.

After a while they came to the foothills of the mountain. It was not far from Danville. The path widened into a rough paved road.

"Up there are the tunnels of an old mine," Zeno said, pointing up the slope. "Supposedly people used to mine gold there."

Pete looked in the appropriate direction and spotted a forest cabin nestled between trees not far away.

"That's where we're going," Zeno said. "There's a path in front."

When they had almost reached the cabin, they heard the sound of a vehicle's engine behind them. Instantly, Zeno wanted to pull Pete off the road, but Pete shook him off and smiled with relief.

"I can hear that engine out of a thousand noises! It's my MG! That can only be Jupe! He's back from Danville!"

Sure enough, a few moments later, Pete's car came rumbling along the path. The Second Investigator jumped onto the middle of the path to stop it.

Jupiter was sitting behind the wheel. When he saw Pete, he braked sharply and got out of the car. Bob also got out, followed by Mandy.

"That's what I call a surprise," said Bob, "and I thought we would be here first."

"What are you here for?" asked Pete.

"We're here to get Percy. I was stuck in Mr Sadamori's wardrobe and discovered a photo of Percy on his camera, photographed only last night. I knew then he must be around somewhere."

"When Sadamori was asleep, I sneaked out of his room. This morning, Jupe came, and together we went to Mandy to finally hear the truth from her. She supplied Percy with food. She swore absolute silence on his whereabouts. He was far too afraid of Sena, but if Sadamori already knows his hiding place, we need to get here to warn him... So... why are you also here?"

Pete and Zeno then reported what had happened. The others listened in horror.

"Sena did the same thing to Percy," Mandy said, "only that Sena did not have a sword then, and Percy managed to escape."

"Now it's over," Zeno said quietly. "I'm not going along with it anymore. It took me a long time to understand, but you are right, Pete. This has nothing to do with the samurai tradition. This place is just sick."

"What about Percy?" Pete asked. "Is he in that forest cabin?"

"Yes..." Mandy replied. "I'll take you to him."

Since they were a short distance away from the forest cabin, they left the car and walked there.

Percy had heard them coming. He opened the door a gap and peeked out. "Mandy? Zeno? Is that okay?"

"Don't worry, Percy," Mandy called out. "Let us in."

Percy gave way but remained cautious.

"This cabin belongs to my uncle," Mandy explained when they had gone inside. "—But he hadn't used it for a long time. Luckily it is still intact." She pointed to a table where two chairs stood. A few groceries were placed on an open shelf.

She turned to Bob. "Perhaps it's best that you now explain to Percy who you are."

"Mr Yukawa asked us to find you," Bob said. "He was worried after you went missing. You see, we are investigators." He approached Percy and handed him the business card of The Three Investigators.

Percy read it with an astonished expression on his face. "The Three Investigators? That's the three of you?"

"Yes," Bob replied with a grin. "We're amateur investigators from Rocky Beach. There, we're still attending school—but at an ordinary public school—nothing like Shadow Stone."

"Why did you run away from there, Percy?" asked Pete.

When Percy didn't answer, Zeno followed up with more questions: "What happened between you and Sena? You can tell us now! You don't have to be afraid anymore—especially of him."

Percy was silent and looked at the floor. He seemed to be thinking. "It all started when I saved Crowe from the masked attacker. I haven't told anyone about it yet."

"—Because you were afraid," Jupiter interjected, "afraid of what you had discovered."

Percy looked at him in surprise.

Jupiter continued: "I suspect you knew who the attacker was. It was not René Walliser, Kisho's roommate. It was Sena—the leader of the Samurai Club, the one who advocates law, order, and a moral way of life."

Percy took a breath. "It's true. I got hold of his stocking mask and pulled it out only for a moment, but that was enough," he admitted. "Crowe was knocked unconscious, so he was not aware of it."

"So the attack on Crowe was to frame René," Pete added, "using René's watch."

"Sena did everything to keep you quiet," Jupiter continued. "He wrote the words on the wall that you were a traitor. Then he threatened you with death at the ravine."

Percy cleared his throat and nodded. "I recalled other things that had happened recently—thefts and destructions at the school. I realized that it was mainly Sena who had discovered or reported them, so I asked him if it was really just coincidences. That's when he almost pushed me into the ravine."

"If it had come out, the model samurai student would have been kicked out of school," Jupiter said.

"He comes from a family steeped in tradition," Percy said. "His promising future would have been called into question."

"What does all this have to do with the theft of the sword?" asked Pete.

"It's best we settle this back at the school," Jupiter replied. "I managed to contact Mr Yukawa. He will be arriving back soon. We'll first meet him at Mandy's shop, and then go back to the school with him."

At the little shop, while waiting for Mr Yukawa, Jupiter and Bob again scrolled through the numerous photos on Sadamori's camera.

Two hours later, Mr Yukawa arrived. Relieved on seeing Percy, he immediately made a call to the student's parents.

Jupiter then briefed the former school principal about the events that had transpired during his absence. However, the First Investigator had not mentioned the conclusions he had

drawn from everything. After that, all of them—including Mandy—made their way to the school in two cars—Mr Yukawa's and Pete's.

They entered the administration building and saw Crowe sitting at the reception counter. Pete gave him a venomous look.

Immediately, Mr Yukawa led the group to his office. The door was open. When they entered, they saw Hector and Fender packing things into boxes.

"That's quick," said Mr Yukawa. "Who may I congratulate as my successor?"

"You're back!" Mr Hector exclaimed. "The Board of Trustees has instructed us to act immediately."

"We left your personal belongings alone, of course," Mr Fender added smugly and put a few books in the moving box. "—And it's good that you are here, Jupiter and Pete. Then we can hand you over to the police when they arrive."

Mr Hector looked at his watch and said: "They should be here soon."

"Take it easy. You didn't answer Mr Yukawa's question," Jupiter said. He loved moments like that. "He wanted to know who would succeed him, but you needn't bother. I will answer for you." Everyone except Pete and Bob looked at Jupe in surprise.

"May I know what you are talking about?" asked Mr Fender.

"It's about solving a crime," Jupiter said, "or more accurately, it's about preventing one... because we're not just talking about a change in the school management. By the way, where is Sena?"

"He is not feeling well," Mr Hector said. "He wants to go home to his parents for the rest of the vacation and he's packing his bags right now."

Jupiter frowned ironically.

Mr Fender remarked: "Sena has done a lot for us. He found the sword you stole. What were you thinking, throwing it into the ravine? Miraculously, it was not damaged except for a few scratches on the hilt. For that alone you deserve a drastic punishment."

"We didn't do it," Pete said.

At this, Fender just laughed sarcastically. "Pete Crenshaw, we have substantial evidence indicating your involvement in the theft that occurred shortly after your arrival. From the outset, your behaviour has raised significant suspicions. Two nights ago, Mr Crowe caught you lurking outside the small tower. Then yesterday, during sword practice, you saw the metal box and later conveniently hid the Golden Sword there. To top it all off, last night, we found a key to the tower room in your possession. Quite the coincidence, wouldn't you say?"

"You may be a good swordsman, Mr Fender," Jupiter said, "but as far as your investigation and deduction skills are concerned, a little coaching would do you good."

The remark was so arrogant that even Pete and Bob, who were familiar with Jupiter's occasional pompousness, rolled their eyes.

Fender turned away in a huff. "We're wasting our time talking to them," he told Hector. "Let's get on with the packing."

Mr Hector nodded and moved on to the next pile of books.

Unimpressed, the First Investigator turned to Mr Yukawa. "From the beginning, Pete and I have been obstructed here—not just being teased or provoked, as one might do to new students. No, we were approached much more harshly by the members of the Samurai Club. I'll refrain from going into details. All the time I was wondering why they wanted to get rid of us."

"The answer is because we were on the trail of a secret," Pete took over. "We came at an inopportune time. The plan was about to be completed. All the incidents lately—the thefts

that were meanly blamed on fellow students, then finally the attack on Mr Crowe—all these were to show one thing, Mr Yukawa.”

Mr Yukawa nodded slowly. “It was meant to prove that I no longer have control over the school,” he said.

“The boys are talking nonsense,” said Fender.

“Only depraved individuals can come up with such confused thoughts,” Hector added.

Zeno had stood by wordlessly the whole time. He swallowed and finally said: “I don’t think it’s that far-fetched, Mr Hector.”

The two teachers stared at Zeno angrily.

However Mr Yukawa was now onto something: “Someone was in contact with the Board of Trustees and arranged for my removal in order to take over as principal himself.” His voice became pointed. “Was it you, Fender? Hector?”

“How dare you accuse us?” roared Mr Fender.

Hector made a dismissive gesture with his hand.

“For the time being, you are running the school, Mr Hector,” said the former school principal. “You were my deputy.”

It was time for Jupiter to intervene: “Mr Yukawa, what is the traditional responsibility of the principal of Shadow Stone?”

Mr Yukawa looked at Jupiter for a moment, perplexed, but then his expression brightened. “He is the custodian of the Golden Sword,” he then said. “—The only one who has access to the sword... but what does that have to do with my removal?”

“First, it was about replacing the school principal,” Jupiter added. “Next, the new school principal wanted to use the opportunity to take the valuable sword for himself—without anyone even noticing.”

“Where is the sword now?” asked Mr Yukawa.

“It’s right here,” Mr Fender said. He walked over to a cabinet, opened it, and took out the Golden Sword.

“Here’s the glorious piece,” Fender said, not without casting an evil glance at Pete and Jupiter. “Hector, Crowe, Sena, and I retrieved it back from the ravine.”

The former principal looked at Jupiter and Pete. “I don’t quite understand.”

Jupiter nodded at Bob. Bob pulled out a digital camera that was in his pocket and held it up to the rest. “This camera belongs to Mr Sadamori. He is a sword maker. Right now he is in Danville. Yesterday, the sword was in his possession. He set out to record its physical properties—dimensions and weight—and took numerous photos of the sword. He must have done it in the old mine.

“On the way there he happened to spot the cabin Percy was in, and he took a photo. He probably wanted to show the photo to his accomplice so that he could identify Percy and decide what to do with the fugitive.” Bob paused for effect.

“The plan was quite straightforward,” Jupiter said. “Using the photos and measurements, Sadamori was commissioned to create an exact replica of the Golden Sword. Later, the new school principal would just simply exchange the original with the replica, and no one would have noticed anything.”

18. 侍の師匠 The Samurai Master

For a moment there was complete silence.

“So I suppose the mysterious samurai master is Sadamori,” Zeno finally said, “the one who got us so fired up with his speech last night during the secret meeting in the tower room.”

Jupiter shook his head. “No, the samurai master is not Sadamori, but is the candidate for the school principal’s post. We have two gentlemen to choose from.”

In the meantime, Bob scrolled to a particular photo on Sadamori’s camera. Then he handed the device to Jupiter, who held it up to the others. “There is this particular photo in Sadamori’s camera. It shows a hand holding up the sword for the photo to be taken. On the wrist is a watch. You can see it very clearly... it’s your watch, Mr Hector...”

Hector’s face turned from red to pale.

Jupiter took note with satisfaction. “Mr Hector, you gave Sena the assignment to force us out. He and the samurai boys were nothing but lackeys to you. Sena probably didn’t even know about your plan with the sword. He lived in the belief that he was standing up for a good idea—the traditional spirit of the samurai. All he did was to lead his club members to intimidate others.”

Mr Fender had followed the last words, stunned. “Tell me that’s not true, Hector! I had no idea... and I naïvely played along with it.”

When Mr Hector just stood there without replying, Mr Fender turned away, shaking his head, and his gaze fell on Zeno. “Why didn’t you tell me anything?” he asked him. “—Not even about the secret meeting in the tower room?”

“Not all the people were in the tower room—only Sena’s closest confidants, and he told us that we were being supervised by a samurai master who was being persecuted in his homeland for his opinions. We were sworn to silence, and—”

At that moment, the police arrived. There were two police cars with four police officers.

There was no commotion. The police officers took statements from everyone in attendance, including Sena, whom the police had summoned. Mr Hector had resigned to his fate and admitted his scheme.

Everything came to light. Hector Fujiwara had been behind all the recent happenings in the school. Over time, he was in charge of the Samurai Club, and through his alter ego of the samurai master, he worked on some members to do his bidding. It was quite easy for him to brainwash Sena as both of them had samurai ancestry, albeit different lineages.

As Jupiter had deduced, Hector’s objectives were to get Mr Yukawa removed as principal, and to steal the Golden Sword and replace it with a replica. First, he orchestrated chaos in the school to show the Board of Trustees that Mr Yukawa failed as a principal. Then, a day after the arrival of Jupe and Pete, he smashed the display case, took the sword, and gave it to Sadamori to take measurements. To top it all off, he set the stage to pin the theft on the two boys. This was done by planting the key under Pete’s mattress.

After Sadamori had obtained all the necessary dimensions of the sword to make the replica, he put the genuine sword into the metal box containing the safety net. Then Hector,

as the samurai master, got Sena to assign someone to look for the sword there. Sena chose Zeno as he believed that Zeno was a traitor. At the same time, Sena wanted to get rid of Zeno in case he spilled the beans about the key.

To maintain the reputation and integrity of the school, and also for the safety of the students, Mr Yukawa had decided to press charges against his deputy.

At the end of the two-hour interrogation, the police took Hector Fujiwara and Sena Hattori away for further questioning. On the way, the police would be making a stopover at the Wilbury Hotel to pick up Mr Sadamori.

After the police had left, Percy, Zeno and Mandy went back to the residential building. The Three Investigators remained in Mr Yukawa's office for a final meeting with him. On his table was the magnificent Golden Sword.

"I guess when the Board of Trustees hears these latest developments, you'll immediately be reinstated as the school principal," Jupiter said to Mr Yukawa.

"Yes, I believe so," Mr Yukawa replied.

"Then I suppose you will have some cleaning up to do here," Pete said.

Mr Yukawa nodded. "You are absolutely right. First of all, I will have to wait for the police to conclude their investigations. Then we'll see what happens to Mr Hector and Sena. In any case, I already have enough reasons to expel Sena from the school. We can't have some students bullying others and setting up a toxic environment."

"What about Mr Crowe?" Pete asked. "What's his role in all this?"

"None," Mr Yukawa replied. "He just gets a bit overboard when he carries out his duties."

"I see that he regularly intimidates the students," Pete said. "Why would a caretaker be given the role of a discipline master?"

"Actually, we have a permanent discipline master here, but he is currently on leave, so Crowe was asked to cover the duties. Next time, I will assign another teacher to do it. Crowe is better off attending to the plants and so forth, as you can see from the wonderful job he has been doing in our gardens."

"Yes, then he can scowl at the flowers and no harm will come out of it," Jupe quipped.

"Don't be too sure, Jupe," Pete added. "Plants have feelings too. They will revolt."

"Above all, you might want to restore the Samurai Club back to its original purpose," Jupiter continued.

"Yes," Mr Yukawa agreed. "With the removal of Mr Hector, it is imperative to reassert the original tenets of samurai culture as frameworks for peace rather than tools for harm. I'll have to change some of the rules in the club, and appoint a new student leader."

"Anyway, what about the expelled student, René?" Jupiter asked Mr Yukawa.

"Oh, yes," Yukawa replied. "I have to think of how to handle it. He's back in Switzerland now. It is never good to have a record of being expelled from a school, so I would immediately rectify it. I will contact him and his family and see whether he would want to come back here next semester."

"So I guess our work here is complete..." Bob said.

"Yes," Mr Yukawa said in relief. "What would I have done without you three? I don't know how to say thank you. Would you like to come to my school for a year, free of charge?"

Jupiter was about to reply, but Pete was quicker: "We are very happy with our school in Rocky Beach," he said. "It's really nothing special, but as much as we hate it sometimes, I actually prefer it over a boarding school. I'm sure you'll understand that."

“Of course.” Mr Yukawa smiled. “Well, you can still stay here for a couple more days if you wish.”

The Three Investigators thanked him but politely declined the offer. They were eager to get back to Rocky Beach.

A while later, The Three Investigators made their way to the residential building for Jupiter and Pete to pack up their things. Finally, they were ready to leave.

“Say, if you are anywhere near Rocky Beach, give us a call,” Jupe told Kisho. “Perhaps we can show you our school.”

“Our school?” Pete interjected. “The salvage yard might be a more interesting place. Better still, come surfing with me.”

“Yeah, sure,” Kisho replied. “I’ll keep that in mind.”

With that, The Three Investigators went to Zeno’s room to say goodbye to Zeno, Mandy and Percy, after which they made their way to Pete’s MG for a long drive home.